

Pamph.  
HMod.  
B.

# BACK FROM THE FRONT

*An Eye-Witness's  
Narrative of the  
Beginnings of the  
Great War of 1914*

By  
THOS. A. BAGGS, M.A.

---



London :  
*Frank & Cecil Palmer, Red Lion Court*



3 1761 09427009 7



BACK FROM  
THE FRONT

*To my good Friends of the  
Birmingham Press Club*



am  
HMod  
B.

# BACK FROM THE FRONT

AN EYE-WITNESS'S NARRATIVE OF  
THE BEGINNINGS OF THE  
GREAT WAR, 1914

BY  
THOMAS A. BAGGS, M.A.



LONDON  
FRANK & CECIL PALMER  
12-14 RED LION COURT, E.C.



*First Published October, 1914*

# CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
	PREFACE - - -	7
	<i>Brussels :</i>	
I.	THE CALL TO ARMS - -	9
II.	THE ATTITUDE OF BRUSSELS	11
	<i>Louvain :</i>	
III.	NATIONAL CONFIDENCE -	15
	<i>Antwerp :</i>	
IV.	THE MIRACLE OF BELGIUM -	18
	<i>Bruges :</i>	
V.	GERMAN OCCUPATION OF THE CAPITAL - - -	22
VI.	AN APPREHENSIVE CITY -	27
VII.	SOLEMN PROCESSIONAL -	32
	<i>Knocke :</i>	
VIII.	THE CIVIC GUARD DISBAND	36
	<i>Sluys :</i>	
IX.	SCENES IN HOLLAND - -	41
	<i>West Capelle :</i>	
X.	THE SPY'S ARREST - -	46
	<i>Ostend :</i>	
XI.	A SCARE AT OSTEND - -	49

# CONTENTS—*continued*

## *Ghivelde :*

- XII. UN ALLEMAND ! UN ALLEMAND ! 52

## *Dunkirk :*

- XIII. AN ARMED CAMP - - 55

## *Boulogne :*

- XIV. SOLDIER TOWNS - - 58

- XV. FRENCH AND BRITISH SOLDIERS 64

## *Amiens :*

- XVI. THE YOUNG FRENCH CONSCRIPT 70

## *Rouen :*

- XVII. THE FLIGHT OF REFUGEES - 75

- XVIII. "THE TOMMIES" AT ROUEN 81

- XIX. "BLOODY MONS" - - 88

## *Paris :*

- XX. GERMAN BOMBS - - 94

- XXI. PARIS : A CITY OF SHADOWS 100

## *Tournan :*

- XXII. GERMAN PRISONERS - - 106

## *Paris :*

- XXIII. THE MOTOR-CYCLIST DESPATCH

- RIDER - - 111

## *In the British Lines :*

- XXIV. FOUR DAYS' ADVENTURE - 116



## PREFACE

“Be check’d for silence,  
But never tax’d for speech.”

*Shakespeare: “All’s Well.”*

This is a plain, unvarnished narrative of sights and incidents of the present great war as they have come under my individual observance. I was touring in Belgium when the first dread symptoms of the crisis became apparent, and it was my privilege to witness the mobilisation and all its consequences in that brave little country. Later, with the roving commission of a special correspondent, I was enabled to journey along the northern littoral to Paris, and to witness that vast upheaval of national life which has shaken fair France to the roots in all its tragic acuteness and patient, devoted martyrdom. My itinerary included Brussels, Malines, Louvain, Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges, Sluys, Knocke, Ostend, La Panne, Ghivelde, Dunkirk, Calais, Boulogne, Amiens, Rouen, Paris, Melun, Meaux, and villages

within the Allies' lines. In these pages I have gathered together my impressions, a few of which in altered form have appeared in the *Birmingham Daily Post* to whose proprietors for permission to reprint I offer grateful acknowledgment. The volume is an odyssey of adventure. May it also throw light on dark places, and dark events, unknown or misunderstood by the majority of the British public !

THOMAS A. BAGGS.

Birmingham, *September*, 1914.

## I.

### THE CALL TO ARMS.

*Brussels, August 3rd.*

Bells ! bells !! They rent the hushed night air ! Church bells, fire-bells, bells of every description, boomed, clashed, pealed, and jangled. The master-stroke had struck ! War had been declared !

No explanation was needed by those startled, but expectant, burghers. The fate of their valiant country had hung too long in the balance. They had been prepared since Thursday, July 30th, for the menace of the sword. On the Friday following, they had awaited the word all day with a tense, perfervid breathlessness. Motor-cars, cycles, horses, were being everywhere requisitioned by the War Office, and towards night-fall excitement rushed to fever heat ; then the order for mobilisation was hourly, minutely expected. It came that evening. That sound of midnight bells on the fateful last day of July was Belgium's call to arms. With alacrity the nation responded.

Saturday morning produced scenes of unexampled enthusiasm. Orders and proclamations were posted in the City, and that day saw the first regiments gallantly march away. Before nightfall the Red Cross hospitals were declared, the Civic Guard

took the place of the gendarmerie, and almost every motor-car, lorry, waggon, and vehicle in the country was commandeered for the "service militaire" of the State, and with surprisingly little resistance. In a single day mobilisation was complete, and before the week-end had passed Belgium, as the Premier declared, was on a war footing. Sunday passed in a flood of popular ecstasy. Dense crowds thronged the streets, clamouring impulsively for acceptance as volunteers. But it was the departure of the corps yesterday and to-day that evoked scenes of the greatest impressiveness. The bands blared, the colours floated, the troops swept jauntily by to the deafening cheers of the multitude. This evening martial law is proclaimed in Antwerp and Liège, and, though Germany to-day sent her vile ultimatum, Belgian neutrality was still unimpaired and respected. Belgian troops had been massed on the frontier. As for the cities, they became ominously silent and peaceful; most men-folk had gone to do battle, and they and the women that remained became calm, almost majestic stoics.



## II.

### THE ATTITUDE OF BRUSSELS.

*Brussels, August 4th.*

There is a note of greater calm and settlement in the city and its environs to-day. Whereas yesterday and Sunday were filled with vague, portentous expectancy, not unmingled with headlong precipitation, this morning finds things more usual and quite removed from all suggestion of nervousness. Perhaps this is largely due to the departure yesterday of the last corps of gendarmerie, who have been called to the frontier in addition to the ordinary soldiery. There is hardly a regular soldier at present in the city. At the barracks the Garde Civique have taken up their quarters, and the same corps are posted on guard outside the Royal Palace and principal state and municipal buildings. Much of the early unreasoning enthusiasm has subsided, and in its place is a sturdy, but modest, confidence. Motor-cars and cycles bent on "service militaire" still scurry about the city, but there is no trace of strained surprise or tremulous irritability.

I have seen many strange and stirring incidents during these last few days. The departure of corps evoked the most passionate

fervour. Yet there was with it an air of utter restraint, an entire absence of the Chauvinism that is as uproarious as it is hollow. "Nous voici, enfin," said a strippling. "Bonne chance, camarade," I replied. We exchanged greetings, "Vive la France!" "Vive l'Angleterre," and with a well-contented smile he surged on. Husbands kiss wives and families in the street—and without tears. "C'est pour la patrie," they agree, and it is a wholly admirable patriotism.

Yesterday saw busy scenes at the two British Consulates of the city. Britishers waited in long queues—only to be told that they must go, and that instantly. The majority left Brussels for Ostend almost at once, and many conflicting reports of their distress in that town have been received. To-day the afternoon boat was loaded with 500 passengers above her complement, and, just on the point of sailing, was ordered not to leave the port, and to request an immediate disembarkment.

Feeling against Germans in the city has run exceedingly high. To-day no fewer than twenty cafés, hotels, and restaurants in the principal boulevards were stormed, wrecked, and in some few places demolished. Whole shop fronts have been obliterated of all advertisements, and signs referring to German beer or products are being immediately destroyed. Should any be so

foolhardy as to dare to express sympathy with Germany, that man is, without any compunction, immediately insulted and injured. Outside the Exchange to-day I saw two Germans cruelly maltreated. Of course, most German subjects left under armed escort on Monday, but against the very few that remain the populace intend to wreak their complete vengeance. The Civic Guard were turned out this evening to guard the approach to the Anspach Boulevard, where the outrages were committed ; other bodies of troops patrolled the principal streets. A crowd managed to enter the boulevard by side streets, and at once made its way to the Hotel Fritz, where there was a supposed German waiter. Five hundred people, foaming, fuming, excited, howled for his surrender, "Brulez-le," "Tuez-le," (Burn him ! Kill him !) were a few of the cries, and serious conflict was avoided only by the timely arrival of a numerous body of the Guard.

But one may hardly stay to "chronicle small beer." Some reference *must* be made to the many foolish reports which have appeared in English papers with regard to German airships over Brussels. It may be emphatically stated that no such disturbing event has occurred ; the *raison d'être* of such reports lies in the fertile imagination of certain scaremongers among an easily excitable people. Yesterday, for instance,

I joined a group of individuals who wildly gesticulated and pointed to something in the heavens which appeared over the City Exchange, and which they urged was an airship. There was certainly a long dull glimmer through a haze. But I stepped to the other side of the road, and I saw the planet Jupiter, fierce in endeavour to pierce an o'erhanging cloud. Another cluster of the deceived mistook the telephone insulators on a high building for a similar apparition. Truly the night crowds of the city are quickly and easily moved !



### III.

## NATIONAL CONFIDENCE.

*Brussels, August 5th.*

The preparation continues in Brussels quietly, calmly, and confidently. There prevails everywhere the spirit of the report of the War Minister, Baron de Brocqueville : " Si la Belgique peut n'être pas sure de vaincre, elle est certaine qu'elle n'acceptera jamais la domination étrangère." (If Belgium cannot be sure of success, it is certain that she will never accept the yoke of a stranger.) Last night's animated scenes along the boulevards now seem quite out of place. Though shops are shut and shutting, and food prices steadily rising, there is no sign of panic, no disorder, no rebelliousness, no disheartedness and no depression. All is animation, eagerness, and zealous patience. Preparations go on apace, and seem almost complete. Yet little provision seems to have been made for the very poor of the city. All the museums are closed, not a few turned into barracks. Red Cross Leagues are formed, and gifts and volunteers are very numerous.

There were many lively passages outside the National Bank this morning. Long

queues waited for hours in the showers to change paper money, and all the efforts of the Civic Guard were necessary to maintain order. It is impossible to change English banknotes or even gold in the city. This day I entered six principal banks, and was refused by all. Some few shopkeepers will exchange the sovereign for 25 francs, but the General Post Office gives only 24, and paper money at that.

The few English in the place are just a little apprehensive. But the presence of Englishmen is greatly appreciated at this time of crisis. Cheers are raised on all sides as they pass through the streets, and almost on all hands the members of the Guard give them the full salute. The news of England's declaration of war against Germany is received with marvellous acclamation. It is everywhere "Vive l'Angleterre," and it is indeed thrilling to be hailed as an Englishman. Many aver that the English troops passed to-day through Brussels, though the news can perhaps not be accredited.

I talked this morning with a reliable English acquaintance just returned from the towns of the Belgian frontier, and he remarked his surprise at the careful and expert preparations made against the Germans. He had seen the Germans in force at Herbestal and Spa, which is in Belgium. Their movements were then in the direction of Liège. Returning to Brussels, he met

Belgian troops in astonishing numbers proceeding to the frontier.

As I write to-night, overlooking a well-known boulevard, there is comparative quiet to last night. The appeal of the Mayor to citizens asking for support in preparation and defence for the approaching strife, and for suppression and discontinuance of jingoist meetings, cheering mobs, and obstructive crowds, has met with apparently instantaneous acceptance. To-night no bands of young men with flags and kettle-drums parade the city streets. All is steady, all is quiet. The streets flame with the national flags of Belgium, France, and Great Britain. Everyone wears the colours of the three countries in his coat. And there is patience in this patriotism, and an earnest and watchful endeavour.

#### IV.

### THE MIRACLE OF BELGIUM.

*Antwerp, August 15th.*

“Omnium fortissimi sunt Belgae.” (The bravest of all are the Belgians.) The words of the Commentaries of Cæsar come home with incredible conviction. Very few of us realised as we struggled laboriously through the “De Bello Gallico” that we were reading the romance of early Belgium, and that the dry pages of our first Latin books contained truths as eternal as Time. And yet how arresting this tribute of Cæsar under the present distressful conjuncture! Those distant descendants of the Belgae that fight their country’s battles to-day are filled with the same mettlesome, dauntless spirit. It is the same heroic ichor that begets their invincible ardour.

We can hardly appreciate in this country the miracle of Belgium’s achievement. Our own arrangements have been so generally admirable that it is no little difficulty for the ordinary mind to conceive, much more adequately to estimate, the full extent of Belgian success. To-day the helmeted hordes of the Kaiser were due to march through Paris, and we find them still hampered and impeded at Liège. It is a masterpiece of spirited, intrepid resistance whose



true worth can only be appreciated in the proper perspective of history. Belgium has given herself whole-heartedly to her task; alone and unaided she has stemmed the tide of the Goth. She has so acted with the spirit of the martyr, fulfilling her king's brave words: "If it is necessary for us to resist invasion of our soil, that duty will find us armed and ready to make the greatest sacrifice. . . . I have faith in our destiny. God will be with us in our just cause. Long live independent Belgium!"

The mien of the Belgians to-day is still reflective of that attitude. They are for the most part solemn, thought-wrapt; impassive to a degree. Their quick, responsive temperament is still there, but hidden. At present they suffer, and therefore gaiety and laughter are fled. There is no doubt that all must and do suffer. That is inevitable. The way in which suffering is borne speaks eloquently of their true nobility. Men—and they are mostly old or very young men—are strangely, mysteriously quiet; women, but little more communicative, speak quickly, with a gasp in the throat and brave, patient tears in the voice. They do not lament the rise in prices, the absence of luxuries, the loss of employment. Such evil consequences of war are not much worse in their larger towns than in this country, thanks to the steady regulation of stocks and prices by Burgomasters. Unemployment is

naturally very much more general, but perhaps it is not so hardly felt since most able-bodied men are at the front. There is hardly a household that has not lost two or more of its members, but the Red Cross Society does excellent work in relieving the needy and distressed.

I have said that the Belgians are impassive to a degree. That degree is overstepped at mention of Germany or the Germans. The fiercest animosity imaginable then bursts into instant flame. Feeling, of course, is greatest against the Mighty Megalomaniac ; but it is the Germans who have burned and sacked their villages, who have harried their smiling land, who have killed their sons and insulted their daughters ; and it is the Germans, they swear, that shall pay the forfeit. We know no such intensity of passion here. And such hatred as is ours against Germany is directed not at her people at all, but almost entirely at her ruler. But, again, we have not suffered bereavement, and in the multitude of ghastly, horrible narratives that daily crowd the ears there is undoubtedly more than a semblance of truth. Eye-witnesses from the surrounding villages of Liège, and from the burning town itself, have told me of the most barbarous, almost mediæval atrocities. I could vouch for the authenticity of two instances that would indeed " make the fell of hair upon the dismal treatise rouse and

stir." Yet, again, that is the very commonplace of this war—a war waged on one side by most inhuman of methods and in distinct contravention of all rules of civilised warfare.

Meanwhile, Belgium waits with a fervent, passionate confidence. The work of the Allies cannot long be delayed. She is somewhat disconcerted at the absence of official news concerning the location of the British, but she is also buoyed up with hope. Some of us have seen and heard many things which time shall sooner or later reveal. We believe that the trust of brave little Belgium will not be disappointed. In a few hours or a few days we shall see. At this moment it is our duty to be patient at the paucity of reliable information and to be sceptical of the many dangerous and lying rumours. Our countrymen will do their bounden duty with true British nobility and honour.

Meanwhile, we may marvel at the secrecy, at the perfection of the British press censorship; it is admirable, though disagreeably inconvenient. Let us labour quietly and wait, fulfilling ably and honestly our numerous obligations. Even now plain, blunt citizens as ourselves, with similar little cares and little pleasures, are being ruthlessly piled in heaps and slaughtered. We have our duty plain before us: patience under our trials, obedience to our appointed authorities, mutual forbearance, and encouragement.

## V.

### GERMAN OCCUPATION OF THE CAPITAL.

*Bruges, August 20th.*

I have just paid a flying visit to the political capital of Belgium, and I am not likely soon to forget the sudden and strange manner of my exit. I left Ostend at 3 p.m. on the Wednesday afternoon, intending to stay at Bruges. But I entered, unthinkingly, a non-stopping train for the capital, and though rumour had recently been busy about the fast approaching hordes, I was forced willy-nilly to go and discover for myself. Brussels was a sad city that evening. There had arrived, with all their sufferings and sorrows from Tirlemont, Aerschot, Louvain, and the other tiny villages, so swiftly becoming occupied and then devastated by the invader, hundreds upon hundreds of footsore, broken-spirited, sad-faced refugees. They came in a variety of manners. Some rode in their lumbering farm carts, others in the new farm gig, loaded to repletion with all sorts and conditions of commodities and little personal treasures. A few had come all the way on foot, even pushing heavy handcarts containing their household goods and chattels. It was truly



a pathetic sight. I distinctly remember one little group, a grandfather and grandmother, mother and tiny infant, who had walked the greater part of the way. They were peasants, stolid, thrifty, old-fashioned people who, though living only thirty miles from the capital, were only then paying their first visit to it. The old gentleman's velvet suit, his wife's Sunday black, with its heavy brocade, told their own simple story. The young husband was at the war; his wife and newly-born babe had been forced to flee from the barbarian. These poor souls were troubled with no luggage. Their all was tied in a large red handkerchief carried by the old man. It contained a few age-blackened banknotes, two turnip-watches, an old silver chain, and some dozen antique pieces of jewellery. They had sat down with others in the Station Square—on the very kerbstone. But the good people of Brussels did not leave them comfortless. Food and hot drink were supplied them, and the other sufferers; that evening not a few found shelter within a friendly home.

But there seemed an air of strain and expectancy over the city that evening. Telegraphic communication had for some time been deranged and that day the authorities declared that they could not guarantee the services of the post. (Two important letters of mine still rest, I suppose, in the G.P.O.) There were other signs as well.

The movement of the Government to Antwerp was not without sinister significance, and late on that eve, before German entry, the brave Burgomaster, M. Max, issued another tristful proclamation which, like the previous ones, he caused to be posted on all vacant spaces of advertisement :

“Fellow citizens,” he wrote, “in spite of our heroic resistance it is to be feared that the enemy will invade Brussels. In that eventuality I hope to be able to count on the calm and *sang-froid* of the people. Let there be no panic. The civil authorities will not desert their posts. I need hardly remind my fellow citizens of the duty of all towards their country.” He begged them to refrain from all acts of violence, and bade them be of good courage. His last words were typical : “Vive la Belgique libre et indépendante ! Vive Bruxelles !” (Long live free and independent Belgium ! Long live Brussels !)

The rumour that the Germans were coming ran round Brussels early Thursday morning. At nine o'clock there was pandemonium in the Station Square. The sight was pitiful. Men, women, and children with the last poor relics of their portable belongings massed together in an indescribable, heterogeneous conglomeration. High and low, rich and poor, with all their varieties of bags and baggage, including even the homely handkerchief and bed-sheet, they

were one in their miserable panic, one in their alarming clamour which rent and filled the air. And the Gare du Nord was shut. Notices outside informed the reader that all railway service for the present was indefinitely suspended.

In the absence of official news it occurred to me to interview the British Consul, the British Minister having recently left for Antwerp. His news was just as vague and just as unassuring. Then, as I waited I saw from the street corner, passing along the boulevard, my first troop of German cavalry. There were further troops of Uhlans following : the advance guard of the army of occupation. The journalist's life is not a happy one with the Kaiser's troops around him ; the other scribes had late last night departed. I therefore set out hot-foot for Laeken, a suburb distant four miles from the city. There again the station was closed. Once again I boarded a tram-car, this time for Jette. In the booking-office of that railway station all was uproar. Peasants with blankets full of clothing, ordinary business people, and not a few clergy bumped and jostled one another in vain endeavour to get to the ticket-window. Somehow—I am afraid not too politely—I managed to squirm through. The delay was soon explained : there were no booking-clerks. But I waited for no ticket. How I evaded the watchful ticket-puncher at the

platform door I do not know. I reached the platform, however, only to find it "confusion worse confounded."

While we waited there steamed through the station a long string of twenty or more locomotives. Several rash attempts to board them, although proceeding at considerable speed, were happily frustrated. One poor fool succeeded in clambering on the tender of the last engine, but unable to secure firm footing fell, escaping death by a miracle, yet receiving injuries serious enough to require immediate medical assistance. And then came the empty train. Like a swarm of locusts on a green field it was boarded. The din was hideous. Children yelled and shrieked; wives wept and cried for husbands; men themselves, by the way they fought, seemed to have lost their reason. That train was packed, and yet at each little station on the way to Alost we were recruited again and again!

I was informed by the stationmaster at Ghent that he could not guarantee trains—not even local ones—to-morrow. That was the last train, perhaps for weeks, from Brussels: there on the other platform was probably the last train for Bruges. Telegraphic communication at Ghent had lately been interfered with. I determined to journey to Bruges, dear, dead Bruges, the quaint old City of Chimes.

## VI.

### AN APPREHENSIVE CITY.

*Bruges, August 21st.*

This is the ancient town of Bruges, and “the quaint old Flemish city” is in grave commotion. Rumour that acquires strength on her way has been very busy. This afternoon and this evening one has spoken of nothing save the probable approach of Germans. And in the Market Square, “by the belfry old and brown,” in the large open space before the station, the citizens have foregathered to discuss the latest and most dramatic of news. Could this be aught else than that Brussels is in the hands of the enemy?

To-day, then, it has formally happened. Brussels has capitulated. No resistance was offered the victorious Germans. They made their official entry at two o'clock this afternoon, Friday, August 21st. Thus much was confirmed in *Le Patriote*, the only newspaper published in Bruges; but beyond that little is known. I have talked with many refugees from the capital. A Belgian baron who escaped in his motor early this morning told me that he had seen the German flag afloat over the Brussels Town Hall. He had witnessed yesterday, and



even to-day, before nine o'clock, whole troops of cavalry, mostly Uhlans, enter. Then he had set out pell-mell for Ghent, which he reached after being fired on six times. But the capital itself, I was glad to learn, had maintained an admirable courage and dignity. They had been prepared for the bitterness by the proclamations of bold Burgomaster Max, whose name must be writ large in history. There was no sign of panic or disturbance; just calm and patient acceptance of the inevitable.

Ghent to-day is equally perturbed and depressed. Insistent reports have gone forth that the Prussians are on their way to seize the city, and I learn from trustworthy sources that the unwelcome raiders are moving in this direction and already in possession of Alost. It appears that a battle of some considerable proportions was fought yesterday in the neighbourhood of Brussels—one heard the rumble of gun and rifle fire in the East—and that the troops pushing forward through North Belgium are the vanguard of an army corps lying west between Diest and Louvain. It is believed that the same cavalry will advance to Ghent early this evening, and reach Bruges in the small hours of Saturday. Their object is apparently to secure money and provisions.

At 3.30 p.m. to-day there arrived in the Station Square seven motor-cars with the General and Staff of the Garde Civique de

Bruxelles. There was an immediate conference with the officers of Bruges, but I obtained only desultory information as to its results, the Belgian soldiery viewing with grave distrust the inquisitive Englishman. Yet I discovered that early on Thursday the Civic Guard, who number 20,000, in obedience to orders from Antwerp, reluctantly abandoned their defences before the capital and retired upon Ghent.

They retired further upon Bruges this afternoon, entering the city by train at 4.30 p.m. The Brussels Guard to-night is a sorry body of men. Their military ardour seems fled. One of their lieutenants told me this afternoon that they had lost a full company on the outskirts of the city. The Germans had taken them unawares, and shot them down quite mercilessly, heedless of the fact that they were then engaged only in entrenchments, and as members of the Civic Guard entitled to be treated as civilians. (The Civic Guardsman, it would appear, is not allowed to fire on the enemy except by special orders.) The General at Bruges was to-day vastly perturbed. It may read strangely, but he was in tears. His indecision was great. Some few men under his command, so a group of them told me, had shown signs of weakness and unwillingness to meet the enemy, since the latter would not treat them as ordinary civilians, nor yet accord them the opportunity of

being taken prisoners of war. The consternation of the majority at the events of this evening was pronounced. At 6.30 p.m. in Bruges they have been ordered to lay down their arms. Is it to enable the Germans peacefully to enter? They know nothing. They are restless, and, indeed, wholly disappointed and discontented.

Very naturally such news and such events have caused excitement, and even consternation, in this city. The spirit of the populace seems different from that of Brussels, where the gates were thrown open, and all waited in sombre silence. Here there are signs—obvious signs of fear. The British Vice-Consulate has all to-day been besieged by importunate Belgians for means to proceed to England. Most English people—there are normally about three thousand in the city—have returned. Some few, mostly women, remain, and their calm is remarkable. The streets ring under the tramp of hurrying feet. All the town is in the Grand Place, the Station Square, or the highway between. And all their study is of the approaching Germans. There was a minor stampede for the evening train to Ostend and Blankenberghe. All inhabitants have been requested to hand over firearms, and fresh notices have been affixed, warning all to maintain calm, to conduct themselves with restraint, and avoid any hostile manifestation.

But the nerves of Bruges are on edge. Her inhabitants rush wildly to the sea-coast towns or Holland, being fearful of staying in a town which guards more than a thousand German prisoners, including a majority of officers, and a yet greater number of wounded. The presence of aeroplanes—I saw two of the enemy's monoplanes over Brussels to-day, one over Ghent, and two this afternoon over Bruges—has promoted further disquietude. The hotel at which I am staying is almost vacant. Its proximity to the station and, therefore, its possibility of wreckage by bombs dropped, as at Namur, account for its unprecedented unpopularity. From official quarters I learn that the position here is not to be feared, though there are no soldiers and only a depleted force of the Civic Guard. There is, of course, no communication with Brussels; no news, reliable and official; no newspapers. And so Bruges awaits apprehensively the arrival of night and the Germans.

## VII.

### SOLEMN PROCESSIONAL.

*Bruges, August 22nd.*

Brussels is on her knees before the Gothic invader : Bruges is to-day on her knees before the Almighty Lord of Hosts. No city in Belgium is so Roman Catholic at heart. Nowhere is presbyterian domination so assured. One must remember that the City of Chimes has some seventy convents, some half-dozen béguinages or large almshouses for Sisters of Charity, and, in addition to numberless chapels and shrines, the Cathedral St. Sauveur, the Church of Nôtre Dame, and the exquisite little Gothic building of the Chapel of the Holy Blood. The latter is almost hidden away in a corner of the Grand Place, being dwarfed into insignificance by the bold outlines of the Law Courts, the gilded facade of the house of the Count of Flanders, and the profusely ornamented exterior of the ancient City Hall. Bur la Chapelle du Saint Sang is of immense significance to the citizens who are, without any exception, ardent followers of Rome. In that tiny chapel is preserved the most sacred of relics—a single drop of the Saviour's blood.



I found myself in that quiet city square last evening at eight o'clock. After the panic of Brussels and the general precipitation before German occupancy, to stay there under the dim glitter of the lamplight, to hear the subdued rise and fall of voices suppliant — this was ineffable joy. And thither they came, these good Catholics, in little bands of two or three, sometimes a family together, sometimes alone. They knelt down on the pavement before the closed chapel, and solemnly they told their beads. Others there were who knelt on the hard cobble stones and in attitude of rapt adoration made their silent orison. Two groups seized my attention. The first, a father with a son on either side of him, all on their knees, with arms wide outstretched towards the Virgin, heads turned skywards, and eyes agleam. Not far away was a mother and four daughters, heavily draped in mourning. They had lost father and brother in the war; one single brother remained, and for him and his brave compatriots, silent, ecstatic, they prayed. Here comes another widow, swiftly, softly. As she kneels, the tears glisten in her eyes and run down her cheeks heedlessly. Black raiment is too, too common in this city.

To-day, Friday, is the weekly festival of the Holy Blood. At six o'clock in the grey dawn they started and continued ceaselessly

—processions through the city to the chapel. I joined one by the station. First came the long-cassocked priest; next, some hundred men, bareheaded, and for the most part of the artisan class; then two hundred women and children, not a few of the latter in arms. In front, fifty yards away, was a similar procession, and there was yet another behind. In hollow, mournful voice the priest intones a litany specially composed for the war, and the patient flock who follow return an echoing, mournful wail. They wind along past St. Sauveur, the cathedral, through the quaint market-place,

“Where the Belfry old and brown  
Keeps its watch above the town,”

and now, after a long, dark alley, they enter the Square. It is a strange procession; there are all sorts and conditions of men. The number of families is remarkable, yet most are without their head. All classes of society are represented, and women naturally preponderate. Yet it is a beautiful exhibition of simple, child-like religion. In their cares and griefs they turn to the Great Mother, and go away not un comforted. There are few bright patches of colour amongst them. Sable is the general hue, and it is well reflective of their present heaviness and depression of spirit.

We enter the chapel, mount the winding stairway to the second storey. All is calm.

The draperies, the graven images, the frescoed walls,

“The storied windows richly dight,  
Shedding a dim, religious light,”

appeal strongly to the aesthetic senses. A moment's prayer before the altar, and in procession we enter an alcove, mount in single file a daïs, where sits, as one at the seat of custom, a grim-visaged, be-spectacled priest. The obole is deposited, and in turn each genuflects and kisses the sacred relic. Another prayer and we depart, to make way for the throng that presses continuously. And so the whole morning wears away in processions worthy of an Easter at Lourdes.

## VIII.

### THE CIVIC GUARD DISBAND.

*Knocke, August 23rd.*

Every British tourist that visits Bruges and Northern Belgium goes on pilgrimage to Sluys ; then, golfer or ruralist, he pays his devotions to charming Knocke. The accessibility of the two tiny towns certainly tempts the traveller, and, by way of contrast, it is not a little pleasant to quit mild, melancholy, ever-chiming Bruges for the alluring complacency of Holland and for the more tonic attractions of the great game on the coast. This morning I have felt the call, and I have answered by journeying early to Knocke. The Germans have not yet reached Bruges, but even at 8 a.m. there were anxious groups gathering in the Square, and quite two hundred refugees from Ghent, Alost, and the other towns north of Brussels, made a rush for the first outward-bound tram.

I am told that Ghent was quietly invaded yesterday. Some few motor-cars with officers and a small force of cavalry entered in the afternoon and took possession, causing little excitement. The majority of the hostile forces, it is presumed, are working their way via Alost, Melle, Audenarde to Deynze, en route for Courtrai. Doubtless

the removal of German prisoners and wounded yesterday prevented the occupation of Bruges, and the probability is that this city will not suffer from any raid in force. Due precautions, however, are being taken with the numerous priceless pictures and art-treasures, which are being sent, carefully guarded, to England.

On the steam tram which runs to West-Capelle, Knocke and Sluys this morning I met a young Dutchman who had come away unimpeded from Brussels. His nationality had been sufficient passport, and he had walked via Lennik and Grammont to Ghent. According to his report, and he seemed of quite average intelligence, there were at least fifty thousand Germans in Brussels, including cavalry, artillery, and infantry. Nothing unusual had occurred in the city. The Bruxellois went about their ways undisturbed, the trams were again running, and German soldiers sat talking, smoking, drinking with the people in cafés, quite in friendly fashion. Life in the capital, continued this bored individual, had even taken on a brighter and livelier hue since their coming. All Belgian flags had been removed from the streets, and naturally the French and British also. He denied the report—all is hearsay and tattle at present—that the Allies had retaken the city, but agreed that from what he has gathered in many sources, it was probable that the British were in



force in the south-east, between Nivelles, Soignies and Mons.

When I returned to Bruges this evening I found the town still gravely alarmed. The perturbed state of the citizens has not been alleviated by the outstanding event of the day—the disarmament and disbandment of the whole Civic Guard of Brussels, Bruges and Ghent. No wonder that the Brussels Commander was yesterday in tears! The position of the Garde Civique approximates to that of our old volunteers or militia. They are a superior body of men, pledged to serve so many years in their corps, and are called up for a lengthy period of annual training. Members find their own uniform and equipment. They are the true citizen army. But the Germans will not recognise their status, and treat them as civilian *franc-tireurs*, giving them no quarter on capture. Therefore, are they disbanded.

It seems a great mistake, indeed a disastrous one, that such a magnificent body of these men should disperse. The corps are to a man of excellent physique, and many of the crack rifle shots of Belgium come from their ranks. They could perform much, and this spoiled and ravaged country has need of their every service. Can it be that the Belgians are disheartened? Have they awaited the Allies too long? There is assuredly some terrible mistake, for Belgium seems left to her fate.

So the Guard have broken up ! For the most part they did so unwillingly, though some were troubled at the methods of the Germans. It is hoped that the greater part will rejoin the regular army, but for the present all have handed in their rifles and bayonets, and begun the adoption of civil attire. It is grotesque to see them about Bruges in their curious, careless medley of half-soldier, half-citizen dress. Here is one with cloth cap, military tunic, and loud chequered trousers. Another passes, resplendent in a workman's dungaree coat ; military knickers, puttees over sandshoes, and his soldier's crushed hat, create a striking aspect. With the diversity of cut, colour, and taste, it is a Falstaff army, indeed ! Bowlers and cloth caps certainly consort ill with uniform and leggings ; yet it is not the poor fellows' choice, but misfortune. They stroll about from shop to shop, making their odd purchases. If they are the merry jape of all and sundry, they care not, but even laugh heartily themselves at their own sartorial incongruities. Assuredly they have revived dying, despondent Bruges with their wanton quips and amusement.

There are still many persons, however, who wear the outward and visible signs of disquietude. These are leaving, I am happy to say, with all speed for the coast or Holland. Whole swarms left to-day for

Ostend, Blankenberghe, Heyste, and Knocke, accompanied by not a few of the wives and families of the scattering Civic Guard. Their needless panic is piteous. As for myself, I have come with about fifty folk to quiet and sleepy Sluys. I look forth from the hotel balcony into the darkness and silence that brood on the still, moon-reflecting canals; overhead through the misty sky sails modest Lady Moon, here shining benignly—at Brussels, at some other occupied town, illumining God knows what horrors.

## IX.

### SCENES IN HOLLAND.

*Sluys, August 24th.*

This little Dutch town of Sluys, with its grass-grown, cobbled streets, its typical tree-lined canals, and its picturesque cottages, has been invaded again by Belgians. History records many sieges and investments, and "every schoolboy" will recall the naval engagement fought and won off the town by the English in 1340, when Sluys was a thriving seaport and could number its people by thousands. But this latest invasion has been made in the cause of peace. They came footsore, weary, and wretched, with travellers' bags and baggage, troop after troop of poor, panic-stricken refugees. For the most part they are Belgians of the lower classes, but there is a fair sprinkling of French from all parts, and not a few English. The tale of their voyages is enthralling. Such delays, such arrests, such hardships, such innumerable passports and *laisser-passers* !

When I arrived from Bruges last evening, after various exciting encounters with only Dutch-speaking gendarmes, I thought for a moment as I saw the thousand immigrants

that the Germans were really in the district. There they were huddled together, wretched unhappy people, with blanched faces, and eyes like saucers, and a quaking fear in their hearts. They sat down by the roadside, feeding in little companies, and great was the noise of weeping, wailing, despairing, and desperate voices. In the street outside his little café was the Burgomaster, evidently much perturbed. Accommodation for so many at Sluys was impossible. He resolved that at least two hundred must journey to Breskens. A special tram was chartered, and in the darkness this steamed away laden to overflowing.

All the hotels, pensions, boarding-houses and private houses have been inundated. I was numbered among the fortunate in having bespoken a room, but to-morrow that privilege will be denied. By order of the Burgomaster, no visitors to Sluys may remain more than two days, but must pass on further into Holland or return. Still more stragglers are expected from Ostend, Blanckenberghe, Heyst, Knocke, Zoute, and by this morning's train some fifty more arrived. Their fears are quite unreasoning. Bruges is still unmolested, Ghent little disturbed; yet on these sea-coast towns terror has widely spread. They are so glad, however, to find any refuge, that the roughest shake-down is appreciated. And so they compose themselves on benches, on the floor,



in bath-room, dining-room, in every available chamber.

Many are the tales of hardship and suffering, physical as well as mental. For one instance, I have just brought in for déjeuner a Belgian mechanic who lost home, business, and his whole savings in the fall of Liège. At the outbreak of hostilities he was able to send his wife and newly-born child to Brussels, while he remained to the last with his property. A few days ago he managed to rush away with them from Brussels. They had to stay at Ghent. The child for want of proper nourishment was dying, the wife rapidly sinking under the exertion, and his slender store of money down to the last few francs. The end may be easily guessed. His wife and child he has left for their last long sleep at Ghent. And he himself, with a handkerchief of jewellery, a few poor relics, and some crusts, has trudged it solitarily from Ghent, a distance of some fifty kilometres (30 miles).

The rumour that Holland had permitted German troops to pass into Limburg through her own territory has proved false. Dutch papers vehemently give the lie to the suggestion, asseverating that if German troops are in Limburg they have entered over Belgian soil. No little heat is shown in the controversy. Belgians and English are for the present not very welcome visitors in this country. The Hollanders resent the

aspersions of the English Press, and they express their feelings with an equal vigour. One has to be exceedingly careful not to wound their susceptibilities. They consider themselves as a nation supremely honourable, and generally speaking, their self-conceit is not mis-placed. In the matter of violation of neutrality they appeal to the same standard. If Germany, say they, attempts to cross their frontier, they will immediately declare war. Meanwhile, they will remain unimpeachably neutral. If Germans are to be numbered among their customers for cattle, bread, and provisions, the Dutch are not greatly concerned. With them it is a matter of business, and Belgians as well may be supplied if they will. The indictment by France, Belgium, and England, they aver, is a matter of national jealousy. As a portly Mynheer confided to me over his schiedam : "We are peace-lovers, monsieur. We do not war at the pleasure of others ; war is too serious. Holland has no quarrel with Germany, none with Belgium, or England, or France. We respect Belgium, we love England, we esteem France ; but do let us remain neutral. We know well how to take care of our honour."

On the whole I prefer the meticulousness of the Dutchman to the smouldering discontent of the Belgian. These last few days have brought this much to the front. The cry "Where are your English ?" had a

pathetic poignancy ! It has now the ring of insistent irony ! The lower classes are even openly hostile. The unemployed that daily consort in the market-places turn with a lowering frown at the sound of English. And the educated classes in North Belgium show a spirit scarcely more appreciable. "Whenever are you coming?" they say in the total absence of news. "The Germans have trampled on our body and only our head is left." One smiles grimly and translates that trite Asquithian platitude, "Wait and see."

## X.

### THE SPY'S ARREST.

*West Capelle, August 25th.*

It all happened in West Capelle, the small village and tramway junction where one changes for Knocke or Sluys. Such an out-of-the-way place for a spy! Just a street of white-washed cottages and a solitary inn! But the good man of the latter house bade me welcome. It was the right moment for an *apéritif*, and my walk in the sun from Sluys had made me extraordinarily ready. I did myself justice, and then, not hurried, lapsed into dreamy ease.

I must have been nodding about ten minutes, when excited voices aroused me. The landlord was in "conversation" with a guest. He looked a queer sort of individual, slim, shifty-eyed, with a kind of "artful dodger" look about him as he leaned up against the little bar-counter. My first impression of him was unfeignedly contemptuous. I imagined him a paltry loafer. His workman's overalls, battered bowler hat, and general weedy appearance seemed to confirm it. Anyway, there he was with the landlord, and seemingly undergoing cross-examination.

I could hear his thick accent from where I sat. He was obviously not a Frenchman, though his features were certainly of the

Latin type. Perhaps a Spaniard, or Italian, thought I for the moment. "Ch'ai perdu mon tout à Ostende. Che vais à pied à l'Ecluse." The sound of those "ch's" was sufficient to arouse any suspicions. Natives of one country in Europe always give "ch" for "j." I joined the two at the counter. It was obvious that mine host did not like him. And he could get no satisfactory replies. The fellow stuttered and drivelled like an idiot. He had no papers of identity about him, only a card from an Ostend boarding house. His one reply was "Ch'ai perdu mon tout à Ostende. Che vais à pied à l'Ecluse."

Boniface set off for the gendarmerie and left me to talk to the "fool." He was not so unsettled as he looked, for I soon saw that he had appreciated the landlord's departure. Draining his glass—odd that a witling should so imbibe!—he turned to go. I confronted him, bidding him stay; but he was too quick, and pitching a chair at me made for the door. It was too late! There on the threshold was the returning landlord, accompanied by two gendarmes.

Once more he was quiescent, and once more he aped the idiot. There was no sign of tremor about him. Again the same phrase in the same peculiar accent! The gendarmes compared notes. "Perhaps, Monsieur," said they, turning to me, "would speak to him in English." The effort was a vain one. He would not, or could not, reply. I waited a



few minutes while the gendarmes quickly searched him. They found only the one printed card from Ostend. Could he then, be a fool? But I had seen his attempt to escape. Suddenly I rapped out upon him: "Es geht ganz gut, nicht, in Frankreich?" It took him unawares. "Jawohl," came the swift, unpremeditated answer, and his face gleamed, his eyes lit with intelligence. That was sufficient for the gendarmes. They hurried him down the street.

He went easily between his guards along the rough cobbled pavement. They had loaded carbines with them, and each had a hand on the prisoner, who went quietly and made no sign of resistance. Then, in a moment, with startling abruptness, he swung himself clear and sprang away. Instantly he snatched his hat from his head, and there ascended—a grey, carrier pigeon. The fellow was brought down at the third shot, fifty yards away, and immediately escorted to Bruges. When I inquired at the Préfecture that evening, the spy had met his doom.

## XI.

### A SCARE AT OSTEND.

*Ostend, August 25th.*

German cavalry continues to menace Northern Belgium. From the time when Brussels was left to its fate, the way has been quite open and unprotected to all towns in the North and on the littoral. As a result panic and stampede have been the order. The disbandment of the Civic Guard at Bruges was the first serious outbreak; afterwards the people took the bit in their mouths and the very mention of a Uhlan meant disorder. Most Belgians have fled to the sea-coast towns and England, but a great many for the past few days have been painfully trekking with all their household gods into the undisturbed security of Holland. As one sees the excited populace one cannot but feel that the gravest mistake has been committed. The absence of all military protection has rendered the majority of folk unusually nervous and prone to credit the most incredible fabrications. But the people have been deprived of their last support. To-day a single Uhlan could capture any whole city, Ostend, Bruges, or Ghent. All firearms have been surrendered; the citizens have been enjoined to offer no

resistance. Every road lies open to lead the Teuton to his prey.

Life at Bruges is quite intolerable. The unpleasantnesses of the unemployed against the English, the continuously tense and tempestuous attitude react uncannily upon the nerves of the strongest. Most of the British of that city have departed, or joined the number of their compatriots at Knocke. At the latter place, so well-known for its excellent golf-links, there still remains quite a healthy colony of our countrymen. They are calm, unperturbed; a credit to their country as exemplars of Anglo-Saxon imperturbability in a painfully fear-fraught land. One cannot but express the wish that all Englishmen had so comported themselves on the Continent. Perhaps no more damning instance of sheer unadulterated terror was the ignominious flight on Friday of the Consols at Ostend. Some hundreds of Englishmen were left almost stranded in that city, entirely without aid or advice.

At Ostend yesterday there were scenes of excitement. The report that several stragglers dispersed near Courtrai were in the neighbourhood caused no little uproar. In the afternoon the electric tram service on the littoral was interrupted from two till five o'clock, the bridges at Zee-Brugge over which the rails pass having been turned round to prevent communication. But after the temporary inconvenience, things

became quite normal. Even Bruges seemed a little calmer at the thought that its bridges over the canals, which quite surround the city, might be similarly utilised for protection. No trams left the city after 7 p.m., and at that hour the device for temporary exclusion was resorted to. With great difficulty, involving interminable wandering among the canals, I reached ancient Bruges this evening, and left by the last train to Ostend at 7.30 p.m. And Ostend was preparing a similar expedient. Most of the bridges spanning approach to the town were swung open, and on the front there were few lights. In the dim distance twinkling flashes of fire could at intervals be distinguished sea-wards; they were the search-lights of British men-of-war that keep watch and ward off the harbour.

## XII.

“UN ALLEMAND ! UN ALLEMAND !”

*Ghivelde, August 26th.*

I left Ostend by steam-tram last night at nine o'clock, and travelled this morning to Adinkerke, just outside the French border. There were other wayfarers with me, and a motley collection we must have been, of all sorts, sizes, and nationalities, as we huddled and jostled together in a rickety overcrowded horse-tram. It was our only means of conveyance. Railway communication from Ostend to Dunkirk and France has long been interrupted. So we made the best of our difficulties, even smiled at the doubly officious customs officers, and entrained again happily together for Ghivelde. It is just eight a.m., and I am writing in the little café, where an amazing and amusing incident befell me.

Ghivelde is just a typical country village with one long, straggling street, a church, a school, and innumerable tiny estaminets. There was no connection by rail for two hours, so I decided on a tour of inspection. I proceeded slowly down the main street. Inwardly I was calm ; outwardly I believe I was pacific. And yet my quiet walk through the village caused as much



consternation as might have occasioned a whole patrol of Uhlans.

The street, lined with its variety of cottages, was dull and deserted. Suddenly, where there was a gap between houses, I came upon six bare-footed gamins playing cards most absorbedly in a gutter. They started like deer at my approach. Down went the cards in a trice, and up the street flew the six hell-for-leather. "Un Allemand ! Un Allemand !" was the cry. Windows were banged and shut ; doors were hurriedly bolted. Two women, washing, turned tail and fled precipitately. A sturdy young mother hoeing a potato patch threw down her tools in confusion and rushed off calling shrilly upon her three sons to follow. Even the village cobbler, the only man visible, retired. I stood dumb-founded, aghast, on the pavement. Soon I discovered an inn, deserted apparently, yet still offering an open door. Quickly and quietly I entered, but within, the same scuffle ensued ; the house door was locked upon me, and I was left to clamour for refreshment in vain. After some fifteen minutes, during which I helped myself to a mild restorative, some bold spirit ventured into the street and pulled and shut the front door. I was trapped ! And the ludicrous inconcinnity of it all had by this time quite overcome me.

Ten minutes passed, and then there came

through the house a cadaverous-looking infantryman of the Reserve, with rifle and bayonet complete. He advanced with hand on the trigger and timorously demanded—my surrender! I laughed incontinently at him and inquired his favourite beverage, handing him meanwhile my papers. He couldn't read or understand them, but when I offered no resistance and explained things to him quietly, he looked immensely relieved and closed at once with my invitation. The old dame was presently persuaded to return, though her eye still looked suspiciously as we pledged together France and England. Finally, the soldier accompanied me back to the station, villagers gazing at us through curtains, and not daring to come out of doors. There the station-master, of course, soon explained matters, and the reservist with apologies, departed.

But I still cannot understand the alarm. I was bearded, dusty, and care-worn; and perhaps the heavy stick and blue paper parcel containing my all saved from Brussels may have daunted them. Yet never before have I been suspected a German. The real reason, I conjecture, was the foolish flight of the gamins, and their outcry. The absence of the male population, and the manifold instructions issued by Burgomasters in case of espionage and invasion, probably did the rest. It was undoubtedly a diverting incident. Alone I had captured a village!

### XIII.

#### AN ARMED CAMP.

*Dunkirk, August 26th.*

Journeying by train again from Ghivelde to Dunkirk, I fell in with two Italians in the charge of a gendarme, on account of suspected papers. They were returning from an interrupted holiday at Antwerp in answer to the call of mobilisation. Remarkable enthusiasm for the Allies, they averred, was everywhere apparent in Italy. Their country was rapidly arming, and would strike determinedly with the Triple Entente. But they had also an interesting story. Passing via Ghent, en route for Bruges, Ostend, Paris and Marseilles, their train was held up at Aeltre, midway between Ghent and Bruges, by five Uhlans who had taken up the permanent way. No violence was offered them, only rude, coarse jests. They had returned to Ghent, and travelled anew to Bruges via Eccloo. The incident proves well that the Germans are in the immediate North, and may be expected at any of the coast towns at any moment. Here in Dunkirk every preparation is being made for their reception. The town Reserve has been called up since several days, and the entrenchments and defences are manned by

some twenty thousand men, most of them above the age of forty.

All was calm this morning. A detachment of artillery went off in the direction of Lille, with the flag and usual floral decorations, the whole town turning out to cheer them. But at mid-day a scare ran through the city. "They are coming." The visit of the Prefect of the North (chief officer of police) and the General Secretary of Police from Lille lent colour to the suggestion, but this was denied in the noon newspapers. All chief officers of police residing in open towns—and Lille is another city open and exposed to sacrifice—have been ordered to retire to military strongholds.

There is a hint, however, of approaching menace in the chartering of special trains to Amiens this afternoon, and the Mayor's proclamation that all "bouches inutiles" (unnecessary mouths) should quit as soon as possible. The danger feared, a Belgian General told me this afternoon, was lack of food, although the sea-way was clear. To secure a sufficiency, however, all strangers and unneeded will be forced to remove themselves within the next few days. The people are wonderfully obedient. Already the station square is lined with fiacres; there are heaps and heaps of luggage. I thought the French were calmer than the Belgians this morning. I see this afternoon that they have the same failing.

Meanwhile Dunkirk prepares. There are no flags in the streets. The city gates are shut at seven o'clock each evening, permission from the governor to enter or leave after that hour being indispensable. After nine o'clock the population are requested to keep indoors. Dunkirk is indeed an armed camp.



## XIV.

### SOLDIER TOWNS

*Boulogne, August 27th.*

It was soldiers, soldiers all the way in Dunkirk and in Calais. They lounged in the roadways, they gossiped at street corners, they thronged the little cafés. Never did they seem so completely to occupy a town. At Dover, at Portsmouth, or at Aldershot we are quite used to a military population; yet in those places the civilians constitute quite a respectable proportion of the community. In these dirty little French strongholds they form an almost negligible minority. Never before have I felt such a fish out of water. Walk where one would, down any street, the civilians could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

They were not models of soldierly bearing, these red-trouserred, blue-overcoated Frenchmen. They had the same shuffling gait and slovenly appearance of most Continental troops. Some of them were positively bowed and bent, the greater part of them bearded and grizzled. The explanation was simple. The flower of the Dunkerquois and Calaisiens, the active service men and the reserve, had long left for the front. These men of ages varying from forty to

forty-eight were the second line of reserve, corresponding with the Landsturm of the Germans. They seemed active, hearty fellows, even if of small stature. I saw them for a brief space at work at the entrenchments outside the city. There was no doubt about their determination. They realised that it is for their wives and children, their hearths and homes, and France.

I witnessed not a few poignant scenes as I left Dunkirk early this morning. By the same train left many of the "bouches inutiles" for Amiens and Paris. Aged parents are forced to leave their offspring; householders, property owners of life-long residence in the city, must turn and quit; hardest lot of all, husbands must, in many cases, bid farewell to wives. The law of proscription is no respecter of persons. High and low, rich and poor, fall alike beneath its impartial sway. Very naturally there are instances of extreme hardship. The list of such unwanted persons seems more than a little arbitrary. Last evening and this morning citizens went softly, awaiting their fate. And this man was taken, another was left.

On the platform to-day they collected early, and settled themselves peaceably upon their numerous and diverse packages. The majority were wives, children and relatives of the soldiery. Into my carriage came the wife and two children of a sergeant. The

poor thing had borne up well until this last. Her eyes were red with weeping, and she clung frantically to her soldier. "Mon mari! O mon mari!" was her pathetic wail. The man mastered his emotions; the two young children played together in the corner. And then came the cry of the guard, "En voiture!" In a voice overladen with tender, wistful melancholy he breathed his hushed farewells. "Au revoir, ma belle petite femme," and he kissed the fond wife, as the French only can, on both cheeks and on the mouth. "Au revoir, mon petit fils," "Au revoir, ma belle petite fille," and he smothered the heedless infants with caresses. With that wonderful accuracy of French and Belgian trains, we were away to the minute. The wife sank sobbing from the window to her seat. The two children were already at play.

It is not a very interesting journey from Dunkirk to Calais. The countryside is as flat and ordinary as Belgium. Yet one notices after leaving the old grass-grown ramparts and earthworks which have been repaired and put into a proper state of defence, that here are few crops which have not already been carried. The clover and beet crop still wait, however, and, as the latter is an important one for agricultural France, and particularly at this time, it is hoped that all due measures will be taken to secure it. The cornfields are all stubble, and some few poor

women are yet gleaning. But it is difficult to realise that this is harvest time when grim war and the reaper Death stalk ruthlessly through the land. And it is a terrible harvest! "All is safely gathered in," the words must stick in the throat. And for these rude simple peasants with their rural merry-making, how sudden and fearful the contrast! Small wonder they are morose, taciturn, impassive. Theirs is, indeed, a harvest home.

Now Calais town is very similar to its neighbouring "place forte." It has the same straggling streets, the same squat houses, the same defences, the same inevitable soldiers. There are perhaps not so many as at Dunkirk, but the same proclamation as to "bouches inutiles" is in force, though perhaps not so stringent in effect. Calais seemed almost deserted. A few stalls in the Place d'Armes, a few pensioners at the Town Hall; the rest, soldiers, sprawling in front of their barracks. Mayoral proclamations, since the courageous message of Burgomaster Max, of Brussels, make interesting reading. The majority appeal to the dignity of the population. So, those of Calais. Uhlans are reported at a distance of thirty miles away, but the governor is taking all necessary precautions. "Du sangfroid! Soyons calmes, virils, confiants! Nous allons souffrir c'est entendu, mais le triomphe final nous recompensera de nos souffrances. Haut les

coeurs at vive la France!" (Courage! Let us be calm, manly and confident! Naturally we must suffer, but the final triumph will reward our suffering. Lift up your hearts! Long live France!)

There is a ring of the right spirit in that, and its influence in the majority of instances is excellent. Suffering among the poor is intense; there is no industrial employment at Calais. Perhaps that explains its quiet. The packet-boat service has been suspended for many days, but there is a prospect shortly of resumption.

Not wishing to contravene the orders of the Mayor, a stranger, and therefore a "bouche inutile," I came away soon from Calais. There were the same good-byes to be said, the same crowded trains, the same din of chatter and wail. One could not escape from the soldier. He guarded every bridge, every crossing, right along the way to Boulogne, and in that town he was predominant. It was pleasant, however, to find a group of English "Tommies" at the railway station. My native English had rusted, and their chatter was wholly agreeable. Most other English soldiers had long ago departed.

As for Boulogne itself, it seems very normal. The season, of course, is over, but the river appeared as busy as ever. All yesterday there were embarking some seven thousand Belgian infantry, who had journeyed



up in cattle trucks from Lille. They had seen service in that neighbourhood, and, lacking equipment, had been forced to retire and proceed via Boulogne to Antwerp. The last boatload left this evening. They were cheered to the echo.

One is still very doubtful of the general situation of the Allies. French newspapers are an abomination of desolation in their studied generalities and lack of all recent information. In France, I learn, no English journals are permitted. There is even a censorship on those of passengers arriving from England. We are truly in the dark. Local papers here are full of translations, and three or four days old at that. But the English are greatly appreciated over here. The offer of some magnanimous English women to provide food and lodging for necessitous Belgian families has been received with universal approbation. The Governor of Dunkirk has almost ready the complement of names, and the vessel, specially chartered, I understand, is under orders. Such an act of charity is worthy of our countrywomen, and only those who have actually seen and heard know how heartily it will be appreciated.

## XV.

### FRENCH AND BRITISH SOLDIERS.

*Boulogne, August 27th.*

It is exactly three p.m. There is the sound of rolling drums, the blare of a chorus of bugles, which bursts along the quay. In a minute they were marching bravely before us, steadily swinging along in their picturesque red and blue uniforms, thousand after thousand of the fair-haired sons of France. They are the men of the Territorial Reserve, and, eager, restless under the inaction, they are glad to be leaving via Paris for the front. The rain beat down mercilessly upon them, yet they strode manfully, cheerfully along, with the vigour of younger men—the majority had reached the forties—and they replied with alacrity to the rousing huzzas of the crowd. The complexion of the elements mattered little. The poor mothers and wives, in their cotton dresses, blue aprons and black shawls only drew the latter closer over their heads. Last gifts were thrust into their hands—little delicacies, little luxuries, little mementoes. “Vive la France,” “Vive la République,” the fierce cries of the patriotic women rent the air; and their kindred marched determinedly on at attention. Occasionally one raised his hand and replied. At the station, where the throng

was thickest, the cries were shrillest. Some one started the "Marseillaise," the soldiers took it up as they halted a moment, and thundered it forth with one voice. "Vive la France!" Casques flew into the air on their rifles. And then silently, swiftly, they entrained to fight their country's and our country's battles.

The artillery from the four forts which guard the entrance to the port followed their comrades later. Boulogne is now practically soldierless. Like Lille, it is an open town, unprotected, open to the Germans. Can it be that our countrymen are duly cognizant of the position of the Northern littoral?

Dunkirk and Calais might offer considerable defensive resistance; but Zee-Brugge, with its important docks, Blankenberghe, Ostend, Nieuport and Boulogne are ready spoil for the invader. The attempt on the part of the Germans to capture such towns, especially at this present contingency, would be fraught with a multitude of dangers. Yet if large bodies of German troops came up through Brussels as supports to such a manœuvre, no one can deny that its success would be very probable, and a set-back by no means negligible to England. True, the English fleet sweeps the narrow seas of the Channel. Yet Ostend, Zee-Brugge or Boulogne would make a most effective basis from which to direct an

airship flottila against Britain. Germany has for years coveted such a port. Let us see that we anticipate her efforts.

As for the town of Boulogne itself, it is comparatively calm. The temporary disturbance of Sunday and Monday has become stilled; the rush of Belgians, French and English across the water has greatly subsided, and there is promise of a more rational air of composure. Three boats have been running daily for Folkestone and I was assured by a captain this morning that, though there has been unusual excitement in the town, the boats have never had their complement of passengers. There is accommodation for 1,300 persons on each turbine steamer, but the vessels which left before noon to-day had no more than a few hundred apiece. This afternoon's boat was more packed, the Nord Express from Paris being many hours late, and only arriving at 2 p.m. The delay was due to the transportation of troops. Few English departed to-day. The passengers were mostly French refugees from Courtrai, and the neighbourhood of Lille, with others from the Pas de Calais. Some dozen Americans with their stars and stripes flags left this afternoon after a three days' journey from Switzerland, via Paris.

But the Boulonnais are never tired of talking of one subject. It is the British soldier for whom they profess unfeigned admiration. Let one confess one's nationality

in a café, and all are immediately eager to tell of “*vos braves soldats Anglais.*” The Scotch soldiers at once took the eye of the women. They were the first to arrive, and the last to leave, and more than one little Boulonnaise lost her heart to the “*soldats aux jupes*”—O cunning phrase! Frankly, the good people of the town had expected an ill-bred, ill-conducted army of hooligans. The English, they said, were volunteers, and how could one expect anything else but gaol-birds and criminals! Their surprise has been as great as their delight. “*Ils sont tous si gais, si braves. Ils chantent toujours,*” said a vivacious little couturière, and humming the first lines of that pathetic ballad “*Tipperary,*” she began to coax me to continue. Had I seen “*leur boulangerie fantastique ?*”—the camp bakery! She spoke of it as the eighth wonder of the world. Then there was Lord Kitchener. Was he not a hero? And with him as Secretary for War were not the English sure to win? But we English always won. We were so dogged, so determined; we always fought to a finish. And somehow we had always lasted. She loved England and the English. Had I seen the keepsake of her “brave”? She showed me a hand-grenade from his collar.

Yes, the French have profound confidence in Lord Kitchener and his army. “*Nous irons jusqu’an bout.*” (We shall fight to



the finish.) That is our watchword on the Continent. Even the voices of the railers, who were wont to scoff at our 70,000 men, have lost their foolish rancour. Our army is rehabilitated in the eyes of the nations. Let us see that we lend it all support, for this war will try our reserves of men and supplies to the uttermost. I am told by the stray Englishmen I meet that our people are little upset by the crisis ; that unemployment is rife, but holiday-making is as much in vogue as ever. To people in this distressful country the attitude is inexplicable. If it is at all as common as I am told, I raise grateful hands that it is unknown on this side of the Channel at present.

“Milton ! Thou should'st be living at this hour :  
England hath need of thee.”

The Wordsworthian lines written a century ago on a like occasion recur irresistibly to mind. Is England that “fen of stagnant water ?” Are Englishmen, then, so selfish ? Returning to France by this morning's boat were some dozen middle-aged chefs and waiters from London. They were answering their country's call. One of them, a reservist of forty-two years, from Valenciennes, limped badly with rheumatic arthritis ; but he was eager in spirit and downright in determination. At the moment of writing the last four companies of the artillery have passed into the station. They have gone gaily, gladly. For enthusiasm the French

will ever remain our masters. And these were much-married men, many grey-bearded and moustached ! They went easily, each with his knapsack, pile of blankets, and pannikin behind him, and a little tricolour jauntily stuck in his rifle. Women break their ranks to hug and kiss them. Men exhilaratingly embrace. And yet they realise the gravity of it all ! There must be no backwardness of recruiting in England. Let our youth come forward to do their duty ! Let them show themselves worthy of their ancestors :

“One equal temper of heroic hearts  
To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.”

## XVI.

### THE YOUNG FRENCH CONSCRIPT.

*Amiens, August 28th.*

They have left Boulogne this noon, those young conscripts of twenty years. For many it is the first journey of any length from their native town and they are not a little pleased at the prospect. As one would expect, not a few are quite beardless youths, rosy-cheeked, torn away from the embrace of their mothers; others there are that are stocky and bronzed, hardened sailor lads, that rejoice at their incipient moustaches. And they are all so irresistibly gay. "Gaité de coeur"; it is the eternal treasure-house of the Frenchman, his distinguishing characteristic in the world. It is unwearying, ever resilient, and it is still one of the best forms of courage. These young people had the spirit in abundance. They were our stay of pleasure and delight during a protracted railway journey.

We left Boulogne at 1.30 p.m. Contrary to usual custom, the station was crowded with friends and relatives of the youths. How they eluded the vigilant soldiers that guard each entrance to scan passports is inexplicable. Perhaps that stern watch was relaxed, for certainly access to compartments was difficult on account of their assembled

thousands. They were packed ten to a compartment, and each conscript had his relatives into the third and fourth generation. Their partings were poignant, pathetic. They embraced one and all, without distinction of persons, and with such innocent animation. As we steamed out, the crowd boomed forth "*La Marseillaise*." It was a moment of tense excitement. "*Vive la France*." "*Vivent les conscrits*." The blood raced madly through the veins. "*Moi piur Berlin*," ("I'm off to Berlin") shouts a nervous, hatless boy. "*Avec la tête de Guillaume*," ("With the Kaiser's head") responds another, and with such greetings we started on our way.

It was thus throughout the journey. There could be no mistaking their eagerness. Were they glad to be going to fight? A pale youth drew himself up, his face glowed: "*Monsieur, nous sommes tous fiers*," ("Sir, we are proud to do so.") But there is a danger, I hinted. "*Danger!*" he returned almost scornfully. "*It is for fatherland, and death is but the fortune of war.*" That was the expression of a mere youngster. It was also the speech of a young hero. And they are all heroes; all go forth with the same happy, mettlesome, and dauntless spirit, and in that spirit they are assured to win. They realise, perhaps as we English do not, and never will, that this war is a war to the very finish, a grim fight for national

existence. Within a few months' space those youths will be on the battlefield. "We shall start for Berlin in fifteen days," they laughingly told me. Most of them were quite ignorant of soldiering. More than one confessed to me that he had never fired a shot. Yet they were unmistakably eager for the fray. Their short training at Lisieux, in Normandy, where the conscripts are pouring in by thousands, will hardly fit them at once for the front, but they all have the right fighting instinct, and with that wonders can be accomplished.

And so they sang and cheered us from 1.30 till 9.30 p.m. We were delayed only a matter of four hours—the great railway company of the north seems to have completely lost its reputation in these extraordinary times—yet all that while their excitement was unflagging. Of course, it is the Latin temperament. We English are differently made. The nearest exemplars are our Welsh or Irish, whose "*perfidum ingenium*" is still alight. But these youths made the most of their short remaining liberty. They scrawled gross caricatures of William II. on the carriages, they inscribed "*Train de plaisir pour Berlin*" on the exteriors. At each crossing, each station that we hurried past, there were the people turned out to wave adieux, and the glad youths to cheer madly in reply. The whole countryside left its work for the



moment. The farmer left his reaping, the women their hoeing, the nuns their quiet repose, the workmen their labour, the soldier his washing in the stream. All rose to give youth a hearty God-speed. If we stopped at a station, they pressed gifts upon them : Hands full of pears, apples, plums, cheeses, bottles of wine and coffee. And the young soldiers lavished kisses and embraces in return on men, women, and children.

Is not this story a parable ? May it not serve as a lesson to us ? Britain has need of her sons, her young sons. Shall Britain be weighed and found wanting ? We do not, cannot, appreciate the solemnity, the dangerous gravity of the situation, as we repose at our comfortable firesides and dream of our national security that is kept by our girdle, the sea. Did we but know, the revolver points at our heart ; and if we fall, we fall for ever. O, you gentlemen of England that sit at home at ease, there is work—noble, heroic work waiting for you this day. Your English ancestry must not allow you to neglect it. “ Your King and country need you.” Could there be a worthier call ? And there waits for you the career of glory. Remember those words of the Latin poet that speak clearly and insistently to-day across the passage of the centuries : “ Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.” (It is a thing sweet and fitting to die for fatherland.) You cannot refuse that call. Shall the

young conscripts of France lead the way ?  
Shall our lion-hearted England follow ? I  
believe you will realise our clamant danger,  
that you will come boldly forward to fill  
the breach of our Empire's necessity. The  
old spirit burns surely as brightly as ever.

## XVII.

### THE FLIGHT OF REFUGEES.

*Rouen, August 29th.*

To-day at twelve noon I entered the dirty little square at Amiens where, almost hidden from sight by market-stalls and coster-barrows, stands the General Post Office. The letter-boxes were all plastered up ; the issue of stamps, postal orders, etc., was suspended. I was told by a nervous assistant that all postal and telegraphic communication in any direction was indefinitely interrupted. No adequate reason could be given. It had been so since eleven p.m. on the Friday. Later I learnt the cause of the disturbance. Certain outward and visible signs had arrested my attention. Amiens, I knew, has for some time been used as the military base of English troops ; they had all left the city that evening. There were no trains running to Boulogne. The gendarmerie had left the city. I had been awakened by the hurrying clatter of artillery past my hotel early next morning. And then an officer of infantry confided to me that the German right was pushing strongly on, and that Uhlans, in considerable numbers, had been observed at Albert, a distance of some seventeen miles away.

The scenes at the Central Station of Amiens baffle all description. Imagine a courtyard, thirty yards wide and a hundred yards long, packed and packed with frightened people to the number of several thousands, with no order, no control, but each one pushing and fighting a way through the little wicket-door where passports and laissez-passers were inspected. There were no police, no soldiers! It was a battle for the strongest. Old women wept, children shrieked, men gasped helplessly. Not a few persons were badly maltreated and there were several cases for the ambulance. Yet somehow or other we all managed to pass that barrier, to worm our way through another riotous mob to the ticket-office, and once again to drive away to our train and compartment. As fast as we moved others took our places. No quarter was asked and none was given—even to women and children. It was a sickening spectacle.

The main line of the Nord express to Paris was encumbered by trains of troops and wounded. Perhaps one could get to Paris from Rouen, an official volunteered; he was not certain, but communication was only open through that direction. We decided to venture. I never thought railway travelling could be so uncomfortable. We left at 1 p.m., crawled drearily along till within a few miles of Rouen, then dragged

on at 100 yards at a time, reaching the city six hours late at 10.30 p.m. The journey would have been impossible without the cheery spirits of the many young conscripts on their way to Lisieux. They were unquenchably gay, singing their lightsome soldier ditties and telling their droll little stories. Their songs seem so different from those favoured by the British soldier. They are excellent marching tunes, with a martial refrain or a tale of their sweetheart's coquetry. As for our British songs, they cannot understand them. "Your English soldiers are so gay, so lively; and yet they sing so sad and melancholy tunes." I am personally quite at a loss to explain the popularity of "Tipperary." "The girl I left behind me" had a military flavour and swing—that, indeed, was more French—but, after all, there is no disputing about tastes.

I met several odd parties of English soldiers at wayside stations. Four men of the Army Veterinary Corps were cast away at a lonely stopping-place, the centre of a group of officials wildly gesticulating in their attempts to understand English. They had a dozen lame and wounded horses with them, and wished to get to Rouen. My services as interpreter were much appreciated. They themselves, had seen little fighting, but they still lived in the hope. Their waggon was hitched to our quarter-of-a-mile-long train,



and we journeyed through the fertile plains of Normandy, where the rich golden grain, wheat, barley and oats, full to the ear, stood in many places waiting to be cut. Now and then our train took upon itself to stop, and—just consider the difference of railway companies—the whole train-load descended, sat on the rails and banks, while the young conscripts went blackberrying and nutting. It was humourous but for the deadening delay.

At Boncour Station I found a burly sergeant and section of the Royal Army Medical Corps. They had left Amiens last night and were waiting at Boncour for orders. There was much to hear of our English wounded, many of whom are in hospital at Rouen. A whole battalion of our men, they told me, were practically annihilated by German treachery. At some village outside Mons our men saw approaching a horde of women and children refugees. "Cease fire," was ordered. Twenty minutes later they found it an ambush, a German corps advancing with mitrailleuses under that frail human bodyguard. Of that English battalion twenty men, I was assured, survive. German treachery speaks for itself. Some days ago in the *Telegraaf*, and other Dutch papers I read of the Great Barbarians' fiat that all journalists caught shall be shot. I read in yesterday's issue of *Le Telegramme* that four English journalists

have been so murdered on the Dutch frontier. The "man of blood" has to pay a terrible reckoning!

Here is another tale of atrocity, which was stammered out by a poor woman from the same district around Mons. I met her here in Rouen, helpless, moneyless, shelterless. "The Germans fired our village last Sunday. They seized all our money and our provisions. We were driven half-dressed outside the village. Most of our men were kept as hostages. We heard the sound of firing, and none of them have been seen since. The Germans snatched our children from us. They dashed the youngest to the ground in their devilry. And then they fired the pits—the coalpits—and there were thirty men of our village within them. They destroyed all exits with explosions. God—if there is a God—help our poor miners!"

There were other nerve-trying scenes before us in Rouen. No place was available for the refugees who came by our train last night. For the past few days these have poured into the old city by their thousands, and great, inexpressibly great, has been their suffering. The majority of such unfortunates were not allowed to leave the railway station. It was only after a searching cross-examination of my pecuniary position that I was allowed to proceed. Even then I tried nine hotels before I was successful

in finding a cubicle at the tenth. This morning I have walked down to the Belgian Consulate. There seemed to be an encampment of Israelites in Rue Haranguerie. They sat, sprawled, lay about in myriads of attitudes, many half-naked, all an-hungered. The Consul and his assistants distributed clothing and bread and coffee; and the good people of the city of Rouen have risen to the occasion, though many of these wretched families had to pass the night in schools, churches, in stables, and on straw. There are not a few octogenarians, of both sexes. Their plight is piteous. The Rouennais, however, have charitably taken many into their houses and so considerably alleviated the suffering. But these poor people must remain here for some time. A few will journey to Paris and down country, others to Le Havre and England; most have an odyssey of suffering before them. If ever sweet charity were needed, it is among these simple, sorrowing souls.

## XVIII.

### THE "TOMMIES" AT ROUEN.

*Rouen, August 30th.*

Rouen is a glorious place this sunny Sunday morning. The streets are gay with colour, the cafés thronged with society; life, and busy, happy life at that, seems to engross all things. It is a welcome change to the dull, bodeful gloom of Amiens, and it is so agreeable to hear again the ring of English voices. There are many such voices in these thronging streets—voices of English soldiers which made glad music in the ears. They belong to a variety of regiments. There are Scotsmen in their khaki and kilts, R.A.M.C.'s with their Red Cross badges, cavalrymen, infantrymen, privates, sergeants, and captains, of a variety of regiments and countries. To a man they are merry and bright. Most know the rigours of the battlefield, and most rejoice in this temporary opportunity of recreation. They are very orderly; in bearing and general behaviour they are a credit to our country.

They seem to be having a right royal time in Rouen. The citizens are very obviously fond of them. Flowers, gifts of chocolate and other dainties are showered upon them, and they accept them with blushing surprise

and gratitude. I first met a corporal of the Royal Army Medical Corps, who came from Manchester. He was very satisfied with the conditions of active service, remarking that they quite surpassed his expectations. The British force was well fed and well cared for; everything reasonable had been provided for the men's comfort. What was specially appreciated was the system of sending a unit to the firing line for a week and then recalling it to the Rest Camp, which is admirably situated four miles outside Rouen. Two or three days are allowed to recuperate, and then active operations are once more resumed.

This corporal of the R.A.M.C. was full of the fine form displayed by our men. They had even in retreat accomplished wonders. Most of the British had been engaged in the environs of Mons, and their conduct under heavy fire from vastly superior numbers had been unfeignedly admirable. He made no mincing of matters. The British were to hold a position. They held it till forced to retreat by Germans which outnumbered them in the proportion of 25,000 to 7,000. Their retreat was precipitate. No runner himself, he had covered five miles in the best part of forty minutes. He had come back with many wounded on Friday, and had been here resting since. There were, he hazarded, quite 4,000 British dead. He had seen German, French and English infantry



in the field. Without self-praise ours was immeasurably superior. The Germans fought together well in dense compact masses; yet they ran before the bayonet. French infantry fired well, but were somewhat erratic and excited. The English method of open extension has proved its effectiveness, and the spirit of the English, he said, was everywhere recognised as exemplary.

In some things the little corporal was very dogmatic. He had been disappointed in British and French aeroplanes. They were, according to his observation, not nearly so effective as German. And further, there was no English gun at present at the front that could touch a German Zeppelin. That was a great disaster, for the German artillery, in spite of contrary report, made excellent practice and sad havoc among our men by reason of the aim it could take from Zeppelins. The huge, cigar-shaped ships would sail harmlessly over our heads, he said, and we could do nothing. They would slowly circle. We knew, then, that shrapnel would burst on us in a minute, and we threw ourselves flat with what cover there was possible. The Germans had shown themselves infinitely treacherous. He had buried endless English who had been ruthlessly killed on the field, though at first only wounded by the enemy. They disguised themselves in khaki, they fired on the Red

Cross. He had not a good word, honestly, to say for them, and they would get, he believed, all that they really deserved.

We had hardly settled down in our café when there entered two well-browned warriors just lately returned from the front. We welcomed them gladly, for, returned only last night, they had much to tell. They were both privates of the East Surrey Regiment, reservists, and remarkably intelligent fellows. They had been in the firing line without rest or respite from Sunday last till Thursday. Our men had lost heavily, being outnumbered excessively, but putting up a remarkably excellent defence. How they escaped they cannot and do not attempt to explain. They are now fatalists of the first water. "If it's for you, it's for you," they said with a shrug of the shoulders in their not unpleasant Cockney accent, and it well expressed their general attitude.

The first day under fire, they said, was terrible; bullets pinged and hissed all around one, and one waited fearfully every moment for the quietus. The next day one found that the nervous system was no more, and that bullets and shrapnel were no more than flies in an English summer. Our men had been employed for four days to draw the Teutons in the direction of Paris. Their own battalion held its ground stubbornly, though the enemy's artillery worked red ruin among their comrades.

Fifty yards away it burst precisely, a leaden hail of death, carrying all swiftly before it. Then there had been a lull, and they saw approaching a body of men wearing khaki tunics over civilian dress. Their officers commanded them to cease fire, and allow the khaki-clad company (under the presumption that it was British) to retire through their intervals. They did so, and then ten minutes later they were assailed by a murderous enfilade. The retreat was immediately ordered, but out of 1,105 men of their battalion that left England, there were 109 that returned to Rouen. Others, may be, escaped to join other units, but the majority, they sadly agreed, had been left on the piled field.

They averred that we had at least 250,000 troops in the field; and their conjecture was that the German right had been lured on at a great sacrifice, which within a short time we should an hundred-fold redeem. The Germans could never, they asseverated, reach Paris. Thousands of British and French invested that city, and if all went well in the next few days, in their humble opinion, Germany would be shortly on her knees. I give their opinion for what it is worth. But as for the Germans, British soldiers were ready, one and all, to exact a terribly ruthless and mighty penalty. It was not warfare. It was cruel, heartless slaughter. "Lor', you don't find it among

the bally Zulus," one cried in best Cockney, and laughing, I had to agree. Only private soldiers of Germany are now taken prisoners. Others, including all officers and senior non-commissioned officers, are given not a moment's quarter. They told me—and the story has been corroborated from an independent source—of the shooting of a chief interpreter and aide-de-camp to General French. He was discovered to be a German spy. He dug his own grave, and was then shot by an English officer.

The German prisoners taken were frequently quite boys. They had seen the German officers through binoculars in the act of forcing young conscripts on at the revolver's muzzle. And most prisoners were heartily glad of the chance of good food and rest. They were at least well provided for, which unfortunately was not the case with the English.

One has difficulty in making an end. Yet I must relate one incident. The 9th Lancers have covered themselves with glory. They made a supreme effort last week, and charged with fine success a large battery which had been strongly held, and had worked much damage to our infantry. Eleven guns were captured, and they lie at this moment in Rouen Station. But there are hundreds of brave individual exploits whose story will never be told. Our English soldiers are fired with invincible courage. They endure reverse, as

without any extenuation they have suffered this week through superior forces, with the same stoical spirit as success. And in that spirit they will win. Let me just conclude with a typical incident. There were three of us sitting outside a café. A young child of three, prettily dressed, and just able to toddle, came along and climbing the knees of one of our privates, put into his hands three red roses and kissed him. It was so simple, so sweet, and so irresistibly touching.



## XIX.

### “BLOODY MONS.”

*Rouen, August 30th.*

I have spent this afternoon and this evening in the company of British soldiers. There are, I believe, in Rouen some hundreds or so representatives of every regiment of the British Expeditionary Force. The city, in fact, now seems to have taken the place of Amiens as a military base, and Le Havre the port of disembarkation instead of Boulogne. Very naturally I have heard many tales of victory and defeat. And taking a general consensus of the opinions which have been freely given me, not by one man of one regiment, but by many men of many different divisions and units, I have come to the mournful conclusion that our arms in France have not succeeded in the way that we each desire, and that we have been led officially to believe. The British have retreated ; we were told in good order, quite regularly, with few losses, and on readily entrenched positions. It is a glazing of the truth, a fabrication. Most of our men went into action last Sunday in the immediate neighbourhood of Mons. They entrenched and held their positions under a devastating fire of German artillery for 36

hours. Then for lack of the French reinforcements which they long expected, and which in fact never appeared until quite late this week, they were hurriedly forced to quit their position. They could not retire slowly and methodically, as is their wont, under cover of artillery fire: the British artillery consisted solely of one battery and its four guns were soon silenced. They were forced, in their own words, to “cut and run” for their lives. It was, I am told, a veritable “sauve qui peut,” a helter-skelter rush from position to position in the rear. One man attested that he covered five miles at a breath, and from all accounts I gather that some fifty miles were covered on foot in two days. There should be no possible extenuation of the matter: our troops were repulsed, and they were forced to a wholesale retreat.

Let it be said to the honour of our men that they fought gamely to a man, and held their positions to the last. But to hold out indefinitely was impossible. They were outnumbered in places 50 to 1, and generally in the proportion of 10 to 1. It availed nothing that Germans lay in piled heaps on the field. They came on as hydra-heads, as fast as they were stricken down. A Royal Scotsman put it very graphically: “Why, man, they came upon us like an elephant on a flea,” and I well believed it. The British infantry toiled like galley-slaves in the

trenches, but without heavy artillery to answer and, if possible, silence that of the Germans, all reasonable success was quite out of the question. They could never get near enough for the charge. Thrice a regiment of the Dublin Fusiliers fixed bayonets, and thrice the Germans retreated—to bring up machine guns to complete our desolation. The aim of the German artillery, I am told, was excellent. First, a Zeppelin, or aeroplane, came into the air over our men; it circled in the form of a figure eight over the exact lay of our entrenchments; in ten minutes' time the gunners had the range, and shrapnel burst mercilessly on our men's unfortunate heads. The dead and wounded at the lowest computation cannot be less than seven thousand. And many wounded had to be left on the field at the mercy of the barbarous Teuton.

It is perhaps some consolation to know that probably for one Briton killed there were seven or ten Germans. They were killed and lay piled in stacks. Our machine guns worked havoc until silenced by heavier ordnance. But the British retreat was not ordered; it was a terrible confusion. The majority left kit and all behind them. Ambulance waggons to the number of seven and numerous convoys of commissariat supplies were wrecked and abandoned. Some of our men last returning gave startling accounts of the beef, bacon, butter, bread

and provisions that littered several roadways. And they came through village after village, pursued pell-mell by the Teutons. At St. Quentin the Royal Irish and some of the Warwicks and Royal Scots stayed for shelter. The church which was being used as a field hospital, and which was flying the Red Cross flag was speedily demolished. And our men could not reply, could not even assist their wounded and helpless comrades, but were forced to leave them to their fate. And so they came back, but not the same corps that advanced.

By an arrogated right I took upon myself to see the British troops depart this evening. The Leicesters, the Worcesters, the Cheshires, the Gordons, who have as yet seen little real service, have to-night left for that uncertain destination—the firing line. They went gaily, happily, cheering, singing, "Alabam," "Auld Lang Syne," and the inevitable "Tipperary." They take themselves wonderfully easily. "Carpe diem" is their motto, and indeed, they enjoy life while they may. On the next platform I saw some few thousands of the Royal Scots and the Warwicks depart for Le Havre for rest, recuperation and reorganisation. They again were cheery, but they were the troops who had borne the brunt of the week's fighting, and dreary indeed were their tales. The first battalion of the Warwicks left Boulogne last Sunday.

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday they were in the trenches, Thursday and Friday with other divisions they retreated. And they arrived here in Rouen this afternoon at 2 p.m. It needs a second Job to envisage their melancholy. Eleven hundred strong they left England: to-night, minus several officers, a bare five hundred departed. Their equipment of four machine guns they had abandoned; also their kits, commissariat, all save their rifles. They were going north to recover and refit. They lost most men in a night ambush as follows. Preceding them were the Royal Lancashires and the King's Own. They halted at the base of a hill and determined to take a few hours' well-earned rest. My informants declared no scouts were sent out by the leading regiments. Most men lay down to rest; the others busied themselves over fires and billicans. And then suddenly came the treacherous maxim fire. They rose and did what alone was possible in the circumstances—took to their heels. That was on Wednesday last after their ranks had already been badly depleted. And some poor five hundred survive to tell the story.

But they were so cheery. When they knew that I came from Birmingham, I got the accent thick and fine: "Gor blimey, 'ow are ye, then, ole townie?" came the rich, Black Country accent, and many indeed were the greetings for the Midland city that



came voiced in its choicest dialect. They had lost heavily, and they fully recognised it. Yet there was no fretting. Each was a Spartan, nay more, a Stoic. And I admired them all as they sat huddled, twenty and thirty together in the swinging candle-light that fitfully lit up their cattle-truck transport train. The sliding door was open, and as their train steamed out they crowded round for three cheers for the “Forward” city. “Good old Joe!” “Good old Birmingham!” were the cries as they swept into the night, and I turned disconsolately away, saddened at the prospect before them, melancholy at their misfortunes.

## XX.

### GERMAN BOMBS.

*Paris, September 2nd.*

The railway stations of northern France at the present moment are its fascinating places. It is there that human nature, exuberant or impassive under the war-strain, reveals its own true colours once again. It is the battlefield of the civilian. Whoever would travel by rail these days must be prepared to do valiant battle by word and deed, and, like the knight of old, against all possible comers. There are foes of all sorts and conditions; it is a fight, each one for himself, and to the utterance.

You must first pass grim Charon and his watchdogs at the entrance, where your passports, *laisser-passers*, *sauf-conduits*, are inspected. Then you are free to wander among the other distressed souls of that Purgatory. Cries and wails arise on all hands; women fight passionately with tongue, and even with fists; men growl and groan and sweat. At the end of that Central Station Hall there lies buried the ticket-office window—just one little wicket for these thousands. It is veritably easier for a camel to enter the needle's eye. Chaos reigns. Perhaps you squirm and push with

the rest ; perhaps, if you are tall and of commanding presence, you assume the airs of the official and call in stentorian tones, "Attention ! s'il vous plait." But that may succeed for a while with the few ordinary individuals who in this abode of lost souls have not yet lost the Continental instinct of worship for authority. Most people here are demons ; they know the voice of officialdom no longer.

You still need a ticket ere you enter that higher circle of suffering—the platform. If you are astute, you leave the mob and bribe its former guardians, now its patient spectators. A franc in the right hand secures your pasteboard with magic swiftness. And if Monsieur requires it, he can be shown another entrance to the platform. You know that resistance is useless, and you cannot pass the throng. The hand takes another franc, and by dark mysterious ways that lead through cloak room and refreshment bar you eventually gain the platform. The crowd there is still dense, still full of weeping and gnashing of teeth. You are late for your train—it matters not ; trains in these days depart at their own sweet will. At last, still fighting fiercely, you mount. They that are wise take with them provisions ; you, the uninitiated, starve or accept gratefully the crumbs from others' tables.

Such is the picture that daily confronts one's visage. Things are somewhat better

in this civilised Paris, but here, as in all other places, the refugees arrive in thousands to add to the general congestion. Poor miserable wretches, escaped from the clutch of the barbarians ! As they arrive, most are starving, many clad but in the scantiest and most nondescript of clothing. There are whole families to the third generation, and theirs are solitary survivors, whose red and swollen patches under the eyes well speak of the misery that has befallen them. I saw such an example at the Gare St. Lazare this morning. A little child of seven or eight sat alone on a peasant's basket. The station was at its busiest, yet he sat there solitary, quietly weeping away. Someone near told me his history. He had come from Maubeuge, and had since lost his mother. What happened at Maubeuge is best left in his own brief words, which he uttered at every minute : " J'ai vu mourir papa " (I saw my father killed.) Was it surprising that he accepted neither food nor consolation. His was no isolated case, for there are thousands in like plight, living with their poor friends in the capital. Others push on by foot or by train, when charitably assisted, to Rouen, Le Havre, Dieppe and England, or perhaps to one of the minor coast-towns of Normandy. Caen must be a modern city of refuge. I have seen thousands trekking there from Rouen.

And what of Paris during this crisis ?

To all outward appearances she is calm, unaffected, still keeping with difficulty the unshaken tenour of her way. Unemployment, of course, is rife ; many of the great shops are closed or open only within certain brief hours. The tram, omnibus, and underground services are intermittent and curtailed. Beyond that little departure can be observed from the ordinary. Perhaps the Parisian does not move so animatedly through the streets ; perhaps the strings of cabs and taxis are less lengthy. The only difference one notices, strolling along the ever-crowded boulevards from the Opéra House to the Place de la République, is that the city is economising in gas. It may be that this is to assist the three powerful searchlights which nightly sweep the skies in search of German airmen. The streets certainly look queer with the lamps lit only on one side, or with centre-lights only in the case of the boulevards. But the same flashy throng, the same little world of demi-mondaines in tawdry splendour passes and re-passes.

As I write I hear a perfect fusillade of rifle-shots. It is a welcome to the German airman who pays us a daily visit. Sometimes he is accompanied ; to-day he is alone, and, as usual, punctual. For two consecutive evenings I have seen him flying high over the city at 6.15 p.m. This is his fourth excursion. Each time he drops his bombs and a sandbag with German pennant

•



attached containing a demand for Paris to surrender. Paris is just mildly interested. Crowds collect at street corners to watch the aviator's progress, but the people betray little real excitement, certainly no timidity. Different places apparently have been singled out for attack, but so far little damage to buildings has been done, though a few persons have been killed and others seriously injured. Yesterday the Credit Lyonnais, the Opéra House and Gare St. Lazarre seem to have been aimed at. As it happened I was walking along the Boulevard des Italiens at about 6.30. I was about opposite the great French bank when suddenly there was a terrific report, followed by the sound of falling glass. Then only I noticed little knots of people looking upward and remarking "Un taube ! un taube !" Then arose the din of rifle shots. They came principally from soldiers stationed on the Eiffel Tower, and others in the Place de l'Opéra. Many enthusiasts also fired at it from hotel roofs ; one gentleman with a revolver ! It is understood that armoured aeroplanes will shortly be organised to protect Paris. On all occasions hitherto the airman has escaped scatheless in the direction of the Porte d'Allemagne.

The last few days in the city have been of suffocating temperature. The sun blazed down with tropical severity. The heat was sultry, oppressive, and yet there was no

spraying for the sun-baked pavements. Parisians idly moved about in holland suits and with sunshades, or lazed under the canvas awnings of the café terraces, finding some respite in cooling refreshment. In the evening there was the same spectacle of half-lit streets, and every now and again the brilliant illumination of the searchlights as they played in the evening starlight.

## XXI.

### PARIS : A CITY OF SHADOWS.

*Paris, September 4th.*

“These were thy charms : but all thy charms are fled.”

It is so with bold-hearted Paris. The days of her youth and glory are behind her : she is the gay city of cities no more. Her grand avenues and boulevards are deserted, her theatres and amusements at an end ; her places of ancient fame are unapproachable, and her pristine splendour is departed. The malign witchery of war is upon her. Bellona's wand has swept away at a touch all the glittering tinsel and trappings, and the brave pageant of her careless, thronging life is transformed kaleidoscopically into a sombre, solemn procession. *Le grand monde* has suddenly vanished. The gilded youths tread the pavements no longer. The city of flaming lights, the proud capital of intellectual and artistic Europe, the secure Mecca of modern æstheticism is now a city of darkness and night.

It is hard to live in the Valley of the Shadow. And to-day Paris lives under that menace. True, there are rays of brightness in the patient endurance of her citizens and their spirit of assuring calm. The Parisian

has read for the past week every day of the gradual approach of the Teuton, and he accepts the news fatalistically, with a kind of impassive optimism. He hears the Goths thunder at his gates—and with equanimity, for he has resolved the metaphysics of Hamlet, and “To be or not to be” is for him no alternative, but a vehement affirmation. He may live through a multitude of inconveniences—the Métro may run intermittently, the tram-service be curtailed, the few city gates remaining open may be shut from sunset to sunrise, and, sorry fact, delay his morning milk; the cafés may shut at eight o’clock and the restaurants at nine; but he is still unperturbed, impassive. It is quite another side of his nature, a new trait of the Latin temperament. And so he looks on unmoved at the transference of the seat of government and the removal with it of most of the principal journals. He has a sublime confidence in General Joffre and the Staff. His position with that of his fellow-citizens, he well realises, is the preservation of sober dignity and trustfulness during the long days of waiting and delay.

But if Paris by day is gloomy, what is to be said of Paris by night? The inhabitants of the city are sadly afflicted. Most streets are in semi-darkness, being illuminated only on one side and at odd intervals. The grand boulevards are lit only by centre

lights, and after nine p.m. all lights from cafés and restaurants become extinguished. The *bon viveur*, if he still foolishly lingers in Paris, is thrust on the empty streets. The incontinent boulevardier gropes from pillar to post. And he was greatly disconsolate last evening when I passed on my grand tour.

I left the Place de l'Opéra shortly after nine. A few last callers from the Café de la Paix stood chatting in groups at the corner, an occasional gendarme passed, and—think of it at nine p.m. !—they were all that could be seen. It was little better in the Boulevard de la Madeleine; a few strollers, a fiacre, a prowling taxi!

Turning into the Rue Royale, one is momentarily conscious of a quickening. There is a steady whirr of passing motor-cars, the majority of which seem to come from the Naval Ministry. At the Place de la Concorde there is an inky blackness, which is only broken by the rays of the searchlight on the roof of the Automobile Club. Away to the right the Champs Elysées brood. It is a cloudy sky, visited by fitful glimmers of the moon. In the avenue under the foliage you may find all the young world and his wife. There they find the rest not provided by the cafés; they converse in low murmurs and whispers, as though suiting the word to the occasion. The automobiles still rattle past in numbers, and once in a sudden burst of moonshine



there swept past in all their resplendence a troop of French Cuirassiers, a clatter of ringing hoofs, a glitter of brazen breast-plates, a rustle of helmet plumes. It is again thick, silent darkness in the avenue. Someone passes, a ghostly shape. The evening breeze sighs through the branches a melancholy under-song. Imagination soon runs riot in this eerie atmosphere, whose sullenness grows upon one.

I turned down the Avenue Alexandre in between the two Palaces of Art to walk along the embankment of the Seine. The river rolled peacefully along, and on its waves fell dark sombre shadows, broken only by the reflection of the few lamplights and by stray streaks from the labouring moon. On the opposite bank loomed up the dark dome of the Invalides, and still nearer the squat mass of the Chambre des Députés. Away to the right again shot up the Eiffel Tower, the minarets of the Palace of the Trocadero, and a cluster of columns and monuments, silhouettes black as ink. From the Concorde Bridge there was just faintly discernible the Ile de la Cité and the Palais de Justice, more solemn and prison-looking than ever. A few stragglers hurried over the bridge, and then again silence. It was broken this time by a woman's voice, sweet and perhaps more appealing because of the invisibility of the singer. It was the old, old favourite of watermen, "Sous les ponts de Paris," and

its limpid refrain, so far removed from the tumult of warfare, has haunted me all to-day.

As I turned again into the Rue Royal vivid flashes of summer lightning lit up the severe form of the Madeleine. There was promise of a storm, yet people still sat on the benches and gossiped. In the Boulevard de la Madeleine one found the same ominous silence, unrelieved save by the cries of some individual who would pursue an unhearing cabby. The cocher is very independent in Paris now that taxis are few. At 10.30 the Place de l'Opéra was almost deserted. And the much-frequented Boulevard des Capucines and the Boulevard des Italiens were quiet, dimly-lit roadways with their odd, out-of-water habitués, the listless flâneur and the hard-pressed demi-mondaine. The Rue du Faubourg Montmartre and the Rue des Martyres led me to Montmartre itself, whence by winding ways and climbing of the many steep stone stairs that remind one so much of St. Ives or sailor-town of Boulogne, I found myself at the corner of the Rue St. Elenthère, which runs its quiet way round the Basilica of the Sacred Heart.

The toil was well repaid by the vision with many others of the jaded in body and spirit of that unruly, unhealthy quarter, I saw the sleeping city of Paris unfolded plain before me. It was a kind of transfiguration. The lights had been mostly extinguished, and only the few principal streets were yet

visible. Then slowly with sepulchral boom, La Savoyarde, the great bell of the Sacred Heart, tolled out the twelve strokes of midnight. And suddenly, swiftly, there flashed across us the great searchlight from the Place de la Concorde. It veered round, and there Paris was discovered to us. As I stood on that historic height whence French cannon have so often commanded that country, I could not but think of the eternal glory of the city. Here was the very heart of France, the heart of civilisation.

“France, mère des arts, des armes, et des lois,”

the lines of Du Bellay, recurred to me. And this fair France was in danger of the barbarian! The thought was intolerable. There below lay the great city, dreaming of the storied splendours of bygone better days. The silence of the night-time was upon it. Thick sable clouds enfolded it.

“Dear God, the very houses seemed asleep,  
And all that mighty heart was lying still.”

## XXII.

### GERMAN PRISONERS.

*Tournan, September 5th.*

“We don’t want to fight, but we’ve got to.” That was the remark of a German prisoner whom I met last week near Crecy. He had been captured, or rather asked to be fed and taken care of, along with two others at Maisoncelles, and his plight was almost piteous. A young motor-cyclist in the Royal Engineers had the honour of bringing them in. He was returning to divisional headquarters and slowed down, when three men suddenly started up from the roadside. They had rifles in their hands, and the corporal was about to draw his revolver in defence. He was surprised to find them immediately throw down their arms, and signify by signs and gestures that they wished to be taken prisoner. I met the little party at the gate of the château where we were quartered. Their clothes were good, their equipment splendid, yet they seemed to march with difficulty. An officer gave them some biscuits and bully beef. They snatched the food with hardly a thank you, and devoured it with ravenous voracity. Some English Tommies gave them hot tea in mess-tins. They drank as only the thirsty

and soldiers can, and then lay back to sleep on the gravel path quite careless of further developments.

That is the kind of thing in France which has now become a regular occurrence. Not a day passes but some large or small band of the enemy voluntarily gives itself up. The chance of food, rest, and reasonable safety is the attraction. There is, indeed, grit in the wheels of the German machine. The rains of last week's retreat have washed sand and dirt into the bearings, and the wonderful modern engine is clogged, choked, and obstructed. The commissariat has begun to fail. Prisoners have come in begging for food, and declaring continually that they have received nothing for two, four, and even seven days.

I was able to talk with these three prisoners for some hours next morning. Two were Prussians of the 36th Regiment from Magdeburg, and it was odd to find them consorting with a Bavarian of the 49th. Their animosity towards each other even at this time was obvious. The eldest, the bearded Bavarian, was but twenty-four years of age and the only one married; the others were just turned twenty and twenty-two. Three weeks was all that they had been in the field, and though they had seen no real fighting except skirmishes or pillaging expeditions, they gave themselves out to be heartily sick of all the business. Shortage of provisions



during the last week or so, pitiless forced marches, and then, the first rush of reverse to retreat, had told their inevitable tale. It was impossible to fall out on the march with bad feet. In most cases that meant a shot from an officer's revolver. Their only chance—and apparently they took it—was to become detached from their units in attack and so desert. They frankly confessed that they were deserters. The two from Magdeburg had been wandering about, hiding, pillaging, and looting for ten days. The day of their "capture" they had fallen in with the Bavarian and decided to yield at the first opportunity. Apples and beetroots had been their food for the past four days. Small wonder they grabbed at our beef and biscuits!

Life in the present German army is not so well ordered and regulated as we have imagined. There is no suggestion of *esprit de corps*. Again, that spirit of devotion and loyalty to commanders which is so intensely characteristic of our own men and so readily appreciated and returned in the camaraderie of our officers is quite alien to the German ranks. These three men told me emphatically—nor were they the first nor the last to do so—that the place of their officers was behind their men, revolver in hand, to order, to threaten, to cow, and to shoot. The insults, injuries, and indignities that men suffered at their hands were monstrous.

One of them, the young Magdeburger, showed me an open wound above his temple received from an officer's pistol butt, he said, for a moment's slowness in loading his pack. "Our officers are bullies," were his words, "It's all the time, 'Shoot or be shot.' We don't want to fight, but we've got to."

The big blonde fellow, who had been a painter and decorator in Munich, proved the most interesting and communicative. Feeling in Bavaria and South Germany, he urged, ran very high against war and the Prussians, notwithstanding the many inspired efforts of pro-militarists. The German people, as a whole, and particularly the Bavarians, were not satisfied as to the cause and righteousness of that cause in making war. They had had no real and adequate explanation. They only knew that the safety and unity of the German Empire was menaced. They were fighting at the call of their Kaiser and fighting for Fatherland. It was the spirit of a misled and vaguely disappointed Germany that filled him, but it was the spirit also of heroic ardour that would fight and fall in the honour or dishonour of his country. And this Bavarian was right glad to be leaving the battlefield. "I shall return to my little wife once more," he said, with tears in his eyes. "And as for England, I shall be happy to see England. I have friends and relatives there, and, perhaps, now I shall see them. Ach! but I'll be

glad to get out of this hell, anyways. Little food and then no time to eat it ; it's march, march, and fight, always at pistol point."

Naturally I obtained denials of atrocities. They were not, he said, generally practised, and prisoners taken by his countrymen were treated quite as reasonably and respectably as he. And looting, he informed me, was punished severely. Yet among the three of them we found two gold and three silver watches, and a handkerchief full of chains, brooches, and pieces of antique jewellery. But his attitude of mind was the most informative. It registered fairly demonstratively the crushed spirit and failing morale of the Imperial army in France. He was not the only German prisoner I conversed with ; nor was he the last to confirm irrefutably that impression. The German army is not hopelessly tottering or defeated. It is constructed on too vast and enduring a scale for that. But the German army is of a certainty dangerously exhausted, and demoralised more than a little. It has lost that initial *élan* that urged it on dramatically towards Paris, and the tired feet, the starved stomachs, and spent spirits of its legions will never regain elasticity. The thirst for fighting of the German soldiery is lost in a gloomy depression.

## XXIII.

### THE MOTOR-CYCLIST DESPATCH RIDER.

*Paris, September 9th.*

When I first met him in Birmingham he was one of those dear dandified fellows who, with motor-cycle and flapper complete, wheel and caracole in New Street. How swift and sudden the change! When next I met him, it was on a long, lonely stretch of road near Meaux. His face was gray—dust covered; his new motor-cycle, built for efficiency and not for decoration, with tool-box and provisions instead of flapper behind, still panted hoarsely as though from over-exertion; and he wore the khaki uniform of a corporal in his Britannic Majesty's army. He had come with despatches through a country infested with stray patrols of Uhlans. The holes that he showed me in his hat and kit-bag were sinisterly significant; he admitted being shot at on two occasions within the last ten miles. There was no swagger about it. Perhaps he still walked with that jaunty air that we associate with Saturday morning parades. But the callow youth had given place to the man of grit and determination, and he was risking his life cheerfully in the service of his country and Empire.

Motor-cycle despatch riding is a daresome and dangerous calling. It has the exhilarating spice of adventure, and with it the chance of a sudden, unexpected death. All the natural skill and adroitness of the rider is requisitioned. The despatch rider seldom falls in with a large body of enemy's troops. It is isolated outposts, cavalry patrols, those little groups of reconnoitring Uhlans who take a fiendish pleasure in such pot-shots, that are his especial peril. It is easy to catch the chuck of an engine on a dark and silent road. Not infrequently the waiting Uhlan ties a rope across the road, while he and his companions on either side lie ready for the sniping. Generally they spread themselves out along a stretch of wood and fire from cover intermittently as the cyclist passes. It is, indeed, running the gauntlet of flame, but in most instances the rider issues successfully. Wounds are, of course, inevitable, and there are cases of wounded motors. Our friend from Birmingham had several stories. Once he escaped from a wood and was pursued by Uhlans, who galloped across country and cut off his retreat by road. They fired with their carbines as he rode. Shots hit the petrol-tank and carburetter, and another jammed the engine. He fell off, feigning to be hit, crawled to a neighbouring haystack, dived into its very middle, and suffocated there for two hours. When he came forth, the



cavalrymen had departed, but his cycle still smoked, a mass of smouldering scrap-iron.

There is yet another story to be told of the Uhlan, and for the veracity of this, monstrously cruel as it is, I have had several proofs and vouchers. It must be remembered that the atrocities attributed wholesale to the Germans are for the most part committed by cavalrymen. In Belgium and France I have seen and heard much on both sides, and I am of opinion that the German on the battlefield is as honourable and merciful to prisoners or wounded as our own men or the French. The isolated Uhlan does the devilry. He is under no real control; he is commanded and forced to loot and forage; he has no means of taking or keeping prisoners, and therefore immediately shoots them or in grim jest applies the torture.

At the outbreak of war there were fifteen motor-cyclists belonging to the division to which I was temporarily attached. Last week they numbered eleven, and only two cases could be really accounted for. One had been found shot by the roadside. The fate of the other, a boy of 19 they told me, was terrible. One of them, riding on an errand, found a wrecked motor-cycle on the roadside, and near it some charred remains. He dismounted and found the ashes in the form of a crucifix. Round the neck of the poor fellow he found the blackened metallic

disc which is worn by every British soldier, and is his only clue to identity. It is believed by all the members of that little body that their comrade was taken, crucified with lances through hands and breast, soaked in the petrol from the pierced tank of his motor, and fiendishly set alight. He who saw it and told me swears solemnly of its truth. And that little band of brothers has sworn its equally solemn revenge.

But the life of the despatch-rider, if an eventful one, is also spirited and lively. There is something in the fierce chuckle of the engine speeding along at break-neck pace on a dark and dangerous road, that appeals irresistibly to these debonair youths. It is a life full of adventure, where one works out one's own salvation with one's natural wit and resource. That perhaps is its greatest charm. But it is also an occupation well remunerated. Motor-cycles are bought at handsome prices from the owner, or else presented freely, and the lowest pay is at the rate of 5s. per day. Truly, a list of attractions! Yet by far the most pleasing thing is the way in which these young men have come forward. We were inclined to look half-morosely at their noisy inconvenience. We are forced now to confess that they are British, and made of the right mettle. They are quiet heroes—just as every soldier in the British army. They are men of whom Birmingham may be proud.

They have proved, as 500,000 other men have proved, and as yet others will prove, that the heart of our native Britain still beats as true as of old. *Naturam expellas furca tamen usque recurret.* You may ruthlessly drive out nature, yet she will ever return.

## XXIV.

### IN THE BRITISH LINES.

#### A FOUR DAYS' ADVENTURE.

*Paris, September 10th.*

This is the story of four days' adventure with part of the British Expeditionary Force. Adventures, it is said, are to the adventurous, and whether I confess to a share of that quality or not, it is certain that the last few days have been packed full with that excitement which makes hearts to throb and pulses to quiver. Between Sunday and Wednesday last I ran through the whole gamut of emotions. I left Paris, intending a few hours' walk. Yesterday, after three days' imprisonment and threats of confinement in a fortress, I returned—in the automobile of four detectives.

It all happened in this manner: The dull, low reverberation of cannon was heard to the east of Paris. Newsless French newspapers signified a German reverse, and wounded English officers informed me of fighting near Meaux. I determined to journey eastwards and see and hear all possible. On Sunday morning, then, I left the Gare de l'Est for Gagny at 10 a.m. We

proceeded slowly to Le Raincy, two miles away from Gagny, when the engine was reversed and the return to Paris ordered. That betokened the unusual, so when the train slowed to a walking pace at Bondy, I leapt off, hid behind some trucks, and then quietly set off by road. At Le Raincy, a French picket barred the way. No passage was possible; papers were ignored. But there rolled along a market gardener's cart, and for a *pourboire* to the old driver the green leaves of cabbages, cauliflowers, and celery soon hid me. Once entered the town, all was well. I reached Gagny at noon. The long straggling village street was full of vehicles of all sorts and sizes bearing refugees and their belongings from the various occupied villages. The less fortunate pushed lumbering handcarts, and there were some who staggered along with their light *Penates* on their backs. All came from Lagny: none proceeded in my direction towards Chelles. It was a long, tiresome walk under a broiling sun and through open-field country with no shade. As I passed Chelles at two p.m. I heard the distant boom of guns. A guard of French Reserve, who bowed with excessive respect at the name of Sir Edward Grey on my passport, reported a battle at Claye that morning and a further defeat of the enemy. I continued along the banks of the Marne, wondering at the unconcern and aloofness of



the many villagers quietly fishing. Over the large footbridge that here spans the river I found many traces of the English—letters, tobacco tins, jam-jars, etc., and it needed no Sherlock Holmes to discover where English cavalry had bivouacked for the night.

The road led through long shady avenues of poplars to Pomponne and to Champs, the latter a village alive with French patrols. Each demanded my *sauf-conduits*. A few miles from Lagny I encountered some of the troops who had fought the day before. They were fifty stalwart sons from Morocco, white turbaned and white vested, with red sash, white baggy trousers, and scarlet stockings. They were a picturesque sight, their swarthy faces agleam with a pleasing pride. The officer saluted, and I returned it with “Vive la France! Vive le Maroc!” Their white teeth gleamed, and with alacrity they responded “Vive l’Angleterre.” A mile behind came a Red Cross waggon with five wounded. Cigarettes were gratefully accepted, and one stammered in broken English, “Hooray for England!”

The outward and visible signs of war now soon became evident. Several bridges had been blown up. Many trees lay across the way, others half-cut down with tar-barrels near at hand. It was rapidly growing dusk as I reached Lagny, the scene last week of keen and successful fighting by the British.

Information as to the whereabouts of our troops was everywhere refused. Finally, the inevitable bribe brought the information. I steered south-east for Jossigny, and was happy to find English letters and English newspapers littered along the roadway. My papers at this time were never out of my hand, being requisitioned at every turn, and one French patrol warned me of odd parties of Uhlans in the neighbourhood. I put the sergeant's words down to rumour. But just imagine my surprise when, suddenly rounding a turn on the top of a hill, I saw at a distance of a hundred yards, near a haystack off the roadside—five Uhlans. Their square-topped helmets were unmistakable, their horses were tethered, their lances piled together, and they sat in a group, jesting and feeding. In a moment I dropped on the ground, breathless. I crawled to the ditch, and gradually ventured to view them. Apparently, I had not been seen, and so, after half-an-hour, I crawled slowly through a field of beetroots, passed through a thicket, and found the road a few miles further on. It was a thrill for the nerves! I can still hear the thump of my heart as I lay crouching in that ditch!

Two miles further on I met with another surprise. It was now quite dark; there was no after-glow, and the blackness craved wary walking. I picked my steps on the roadside,

well knowing the danger of footsteps that sound on a silent road. Approaching another thicket, I thought I saw a flicker of firelight. I stopped; all was dark again. Another few steps, and the flame shot through the trees. Uhlans again, I thought, but at the very moment a cry, sharp and sudden, rang out: "Halte-la!" In the dimness I saw advancing a picket of thirty men. They came forward to within ten paces, spread out fanwise, while four advanced with fixed bayonets and rifles at the ready. It was a French outpost. The young lieutenant in charge was soon satisfied with my papers, and pricked up his ears at mention of my brush with Uhlans.

But I pushed on, and with a lampless cyclist whom I overtook reached Jossigny at 9 p.m. in total blackness. From the end of the long street leading through the village came the sound of tramping feet. They were British soldiers, and just following them was a convoy from Brie Comte Robert bound for Villeneuve le Comte. They unspanned in a neighbouring field and invited me to supper of biscuit, bully beef, and rum and water. I ate with a relish and was even preparing to pass the night with them in the open, when the order came suddenly to push on. The men had been on the road since 3 a.m., but without a murmur they limbered up and proceeded on their way, myself with two burly sergeants bringing up the rear.

Suddenly, piercing the night stillness, came the harsh teuf-teuf of a motor-car. I rejoiced at the approaching headlights. They slowed down, and coming towards me asked in the faultiest of faulty French for the road to Villeneuve. I replied in French, and they went on. We were destined, however, to meet again soon. One mile farther on a recalcitrant engine delayed them. I measured the possibility of capture; I appreciated the opportunity it presented. When I hailed them in my native tongue, the two officers in the car looked bewildered. They soon grew inquisitive, and then friendly, even demonstrative. "Would I accept a seat in their car as far as the town?" they queried, setting the gin in the sight of the bird. I knew their guile, and yet innocently accepted. And so I journeyed to Villeneuve, to the Chateau de la Guette. The two blandly smiling officers invited me and the three other occupants of the car, French chasseurs, who had escaped from German captivity in civil clothes lent by a school-master, to an immediate cross-examination. I was told to await their displeasure, and meanwhile camp commandant was my guard of honour, who toyed rather ostentatiously with an enormous Browning repeater. At twelve midnight came the decision. I was a prisoner under arrest. A corporal and guard came along and marched me with the three Frenchmen to an outhouse

of some stables. I refused to join the chasseurs, and so slept on the hard cobble-stones in the open with two bundles of straw as a blanket. That straw was the hive of "all things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts." I still remember twisting and turning under their divers attacks, with the Cockney-speaking sentry just grinning and his bayonet glittering cold in the moonshine.

At 4 a.m. I arose and paced the yard to restore circulation. Two British aeroplanes were already circling overhead, and, before an hour was past, the whole encampment was astir. My guards, British soldiers of the line, appreciated the "humour" of the situation, and very shortly we were breakfasting merrily together on tea, biscuits, and the inevitable bully beef. An hour or so later as *apéritifs* we consumed in their raw state a dozen new-laid eggs. And from the vineyard came copious supplies of grapes, with apricots also and peaches. I have a high opinion of the foraging propensities of our Tommies.

We paraded for marching at 9 a.m., and set off with two manacled prisoners and the three Frenchmen, all guarded, before us. I had given my parole, and was allowed comparative freedom, a military policeman being delegated to accompany me. After an hour's steady tramp we reached Ville-neuve, and I must have presented an



interesting spectacle with straw hat and civilian attire that was as white with dust as tennis clothes. The way led through the forest of Crecy, and the shade from a torrid sun was most welcome. A few short halts for rest brought us to the town of Crecy itself, where we stayed some few hours. The billies were soon going, tea soon brewing, and once again we consumed biscuits and bully beef and apples. That is the staple diet of the British soldier. A healthy one, indeed, though not luxurious, and one which he takes without a murmur! Here there were added to our party three suspects, two Frenchmen, and an old Belgian in corduroys, fear written in every lineament of his face. A motor-cyclist soon arrived, breathless with the information of having been fired on by Uhlans. A detachment of fifty cavalry was told off in pursuit.

At 3 p.m. we continued our trek to Maisonnelles, another five miles, the last three of which I covered with the cavalry on a spare horse belonging to the General. It was a picturesque sight that evening. The harvest moon rose slowly through the trees; on the rough hillside our men lay beside their rifles, entrenched in two long lines; behind the old château, where the Germans had rested the night previously and, in their hurried departure, left kit and provisions all a medley, the camp fires of our troops lit the gloom. The cooks were soon at their business, and

we had our first hot meal that day, a confused mess of potatoes, onions, and—"When shall its glory fade?"—bully beef! At 11 p.m. all was stillness. I retired at 1 a.m. to my Hotel Ritz—a bare, slate-floored room, full of bats and mosquitoes; and part of an ancient keep. In the next room were three German infantrymen who had been taken that evening with little resistance. They literally grabbed at the bread and beef offered them. And then, receiving cigarettes they lay back and chanted the first lines of the *Marseillaise*. No doubt could exist about their happiness. "I shall see my *Lieschen* once again," said one, and his eyes were wet with emotion. I slept solitarily on a shutter.

At 3 a.m. a heavy crash awakened me. I asked my sentry the reason, and his reply came, "Oh! it's only our boys getting at it. Never heard a big gun before? I hope the Germans 'll get it." Soon came another sharper sound: "Pop—pop, pop—pop, pop, pop." That was the German reply. And steadily, with increasing reverberation our own guns gave rejoinder. "Bang—thwack—bang—thwack." Then came the rattle of musketry. There was a volley from the men entrenched, and then from 5 a.m. onwards our infantry fired continuously, ever and ever advancing. It was rattle, rattle—crash! And so it continued till mid-day. This was Tuesday, the day the Germans were thrust back on Montmirail.

But the troops had to push on, and I was sent with the three German prisoners by motor-lorry to the advance supply base at —. We had a most interesting journey. I learnt from the prisoners much concerning the disaffection and demoralisation of the German Army. They were ignorant of their position, ill-fed, rebellious, and forced on at revolver's point. They showed little interest as we passed the battlefield of Crecy, where the R.A.M.C. were busily burying their compatriots and burning dead horses. That was a ghastly sight and a truly ghastly miasma! I saw no British dead—only a few German infantrymen and some score of cavalrymen. They lay in a variety of postures, stark and stiff. Here and there we found a bullock quartered and left half-eaten, exposed to the sun, and a horrid putrescent mass. In between the coppices, in little quiet forest glades, we would suddenly see a dead Uhlan, his horse on top of him, feet rigid and straight in the air. And as we rode along we marked the long, lone heaps of earth piled with white lime, sinister memorials to silent sleeping Death.

A good meal at Tournan soon drove away melancholy forebodings. But the prospect of getting away seemed more remote than ever. I began to regret I had given my parole. My hopes revived at sight of an officer in a motor-car. I explained matters,

and was again accommodated with a seat. We passed through Chaumes, and eventually arrived at —, General Head Quarters, in a very damp and dismal condition. Sundry officers interviewed me and withdrew with all my papers. I was entrusted to an officer of the Inniskillings, a fine fellow, who messed with me and then took me to sleep in a bed. At sight of that bed I was too overcome for words. I slept the sleep of the just till 5 a.m., when the British authorities handed me over to the tender mercies of ten gendarmes. They called me their prisoner, and wished to treat me as such, until I took it upon myself to teach them their position. I interviewed a passing general, to obtain the comforting assurance that the gendarmes were doing rightly, and that shortly I should be deported to a fortress in Southern France to be kept till the close of the war. Finally, after much logic-chopping, I succeeded in persuading two detectives to take me to Paris, and there hand me over to the military authorities.

At the Préfecture (the Scotland Yard of Paris) I made a declaration, and papers were again inspected. At 5.30 p.m. on the Wednesday the General Commanding explained the position. My statements had been confirmed, my papers found correct. He would not accept the responsibility that the British had shouldered upon him. I was

free. It took me fully an hour to realise it all. I had seen so much in so little time. I had passed from things civilised to things barbarous, and back again from the rude ruts of warfare to the quiet resting-places of dull respectability. After such dire threatenings I was immensely elated. Already I had begun to appreciate the ancient line of Virgil :

*"Forsitan et haec olim meminisse juvabit."*

Perhaps it will be a pleasure to remember these things hereafter.







